

# Wanderlust

TRAVEL MAGAZINE

www.wanderlust.co.uk August 2015



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**India's wild frontier**  
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Temple is a pilgrimage  
for intrepid travellers



# Welcome



"I suppose your pages are full of stories about France and the Med at this time of year," someone recently opined. Well, no, actually. We like to do things a bit differently at *Wanderlust* and not follow the masses.

Hence, our trip round-up this issue (p24) features off-season breaks – you can often save money, get better pics and see more if you don't follow the crowds. And think you know Greece? Well, much as we love the islands, there is so much more to the country, so we headed inland to look for bears and wolves (p48).

We also look at some of the wildest frontiers (p106): Chad, Guinea-Bissau or, err, Scotland, anyone? Conversely, we sent one of our most intrepid reporters, Mark Stratton, on a luxury cruise (p88). But it was on an expedition cruise – a fantastic way to explore hidden Micronesia. Who says that going off the beaten track is about roughing it?

And if one part of the world is exciting us at the moment, it is South America. Our Trip Planner (p26) suggests eight different itineraries to help you discover this incredibly diverse continent.

Happy travels,

*Lyn*

**Lyn Hughes**  
Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

## 5 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS ISSUE:

**1** Not all of Egypt's temples are in the same place they were built on thousands of years ago; p12

**2** Greece was the first EU country to ban all animal performances in a bid to protect its bear population; p48

**3** Gents taking a dip in certain parts of South American could pick up a most uncomfortable guest; p68

**4** The world's largest reclining Buddha, in Burma, is longer than a football field; p74

**5** Echidnas (*below*) mate by means of a four-headed penis and hatch coffee bean-sized babies; p120



## THE TEAM

What have they been up to this month?



**PHOEBE SMITH**

◆ EDITOR ◆

Taking a walk through time at Britain's own *Jurassic Park*

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**SARAH BAXTER**

◆ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ◆

Exploring wild frontiers in the Carpathian Mountains and northeast Greenland

SEE PAGE 106



**TOM HAWKER**

◆ PRODUCTION EDITOR ◆

Getting beach envy over Micronesia's postcard perfect landscapes

SEE PAGE 88



**RHODRI ANDREWS**

◆ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ◆

Getting tongue tied over the thought of learning a new language

SEE PAGE 60

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For people with a passion for travel

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**Zoe** Office dog

In memory of co-founder & publisher **Paul Morrison**

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## This issue was brought to you in part by...



### CHRIS MOSS

South America expert, author and travel writer

Chris spent six years in Buenos Aires as a teacher before turning his hand to travel writing. He has been to every country in South America at least once and regularly returns to Argentina, while also stating Spain as his favourite short-haul destination. Who better, then, to help you plan the perfect Latin trip? See p26

**Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?** Desert.

**First great travel experience?**

My first InterRail experience – aimless, relentless travel without any fixed plan.

**Favourite journey?**

By train from Buenos Aires to Esquel in Argentina. And venturing into the Andes on foot.

**Top five places worldwide?**

Patagonia; Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia; Altai; Extremadura, Spain; Lancashire.

**Passport stamp you're proudest of?**

Syria.

**Passport stamp you'd most like to have?**

Lebanon.

**Guilty travel pleasure?**

Reading the *Daily Mail* on planes – and *only* there.



### SARAH COLE

Publishing director at Teach Yourself Languages (John Murray Learning)

Sarah gives her insight into the best methods for learning a language effectively and quickly – see p60

**Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?**

Mountain. I like to have perspective over things.

**First great travel experience?**

While living in France as an au pair I took a road trip to Germany with a German friend to spend Christmas with his family. I didn't speak any German but managed to play games, sing songs and have the very best Christmas of my life.

**Favourite journey?**

A train ride from the fjords of Norway down to Stockholm. I wove in and out of mountainsides and saw incredible wildlife and awesome sights.

**Top five places worldwide?**

Catskill Mountains, New York; Mexico City; Normandy; Wickaninnish Island, Canada; all the places I haven't been to yet.

**Passport stamp you're proudest of?**

Russia.

**Passport stamp you'd most like to have?**

Jordan.

**Guilty travel pleasure?**

Reading celeb mags and buying new clothes pre-trip!



### FRANCESCO CAROVILLANO

Travel photography author

Fancy learning how to take a fresh snap of an overfamiliar travel icon?

Francesco breaks down how he revisualised Paris – see p66

**Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?** Mountain.

**First great travel experience?**

Greece. A long road trip in a remote area. Despite its closeness to home, it felt like visiting another continent.

**Favourite journey?**

Another long road trip, this time in Iceland, again through a remote area.

**Top five places worldwide?**

Fårö, Gotland, Sweden; Kirkjufell, Iceland; Ersfjordbotn, Norway; Erg Chebbi, Morocco; Val d'Orcia, Tuscany, Italy.

**Passport stamp you're proudest of?**

Israel.

**Passport stamp you'd most like to have?**

Tibet.

**Guilty travel pleasure?**

Since I mainly travel for work, my guilty pleasure is taking a 'one song' pause to slow down, look at the people and the environment around me, think, and just enjoy being there. It's incredible how many good memories I have from it.

## Wanderlust Mission Statement

Wanderlust aims to inform and inspire all your travel adventures. We strive to bring you the most trusted and reliable information in the world. That's why we are always upfront about whether our writers have travelled independently or with a tour company. When a tour operator has been used we always try to use those who've scored a minimum satisfaction rating of 85% from readers in our annual awards and we never guarantee positive coverage. Responsible and sustainable travel is at the heart of everything we do.



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August 2015



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**26 South America Trip Planner**  
Hike the Andes, reach Machu Picchu, go wild in the Guianas... These eight amazing itineraries will leave you dying to visit Latin lands

### ▲ Special feature

**106 13 Wildest Frontiers**  
From the sands of the Sahara in Chad to the world's largest national park in Greenland, here's our pick of the world's top offbeat spots

WIN!

A 7-day tour of Colombia p45

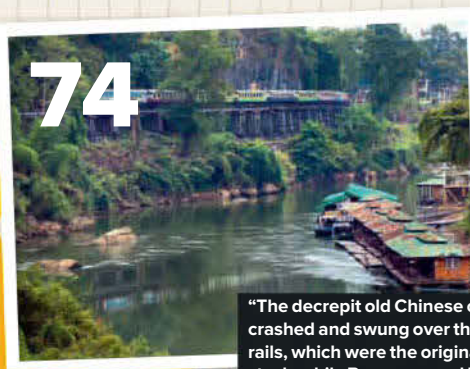
A £3,000 trip to Geneva p86

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"Greece and bears. I'd never put the two together. In popular culture, Greece is a land of islands, not ursines." Sarah Baxter



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"The decrepit old Chinese carriages crashed and swung over the buckled rails, which were the original British stock, while Burma passed by outside." Alex Robinson

Maine, p16

"We set off on a wonderful, map-less week-long hike along ancient footpaths and oxcart tracks. We slept under the stars, we drifted, we discovered." Chris Moss



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## Discover Greece's secret wildlife, p56



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Learn about the vast network of channels that water the Portuguese isle – now a wonderland for walkers

"Wading ashore, I was garlanded with flowery leis and soon shaking hands with seemingly all 320 islanders. Their welcomes were as warm as the sky overhead."  
**Mark Stratton**



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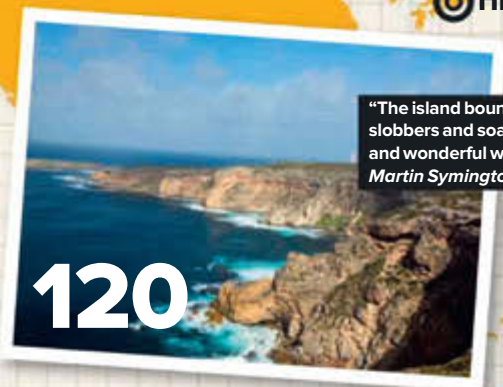
**Madeira, p141**



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"Luxembourg revels in its multicultural roots: everything from its architecture to the local dress sense is a happy mish-mash of French, German and Dutch influence."  
**Hazel Plush**

**Hiroshima, p22**



"The island bounces, crawls, slobbers and soars with weird and wonderful wildlife."  
**Martin Symington**

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**Micronesia, p88**

**Kangaroo Island, p120**

### TALKING HEADS

**Kate Adie, p18**

"When I started there was a genuine sense of adventure – you went to the sort of airport where your aircraft had to fly over the control tower to wake them up!"

Alamy







## AN EAGLE EYE

### Altai Mountains, Mongolia

Photographer: **Keith Partridge**

From the rainforests of Papua New Guinea to the chilly vastness of Mongolia's Altai Mountains, Keith Partridge – the lensman behind *Human Planet* and *Touching the Void* – has committed his life to snapping the far reaches of the planet in the hope of encouraging others. "I've captured thrills and excitement that have inspired many to seek new ways for their own creativity," says Keith. His new book is filled with wild tales and often vertigo-inducing images of these landscapes and the people that live in them – such as the Kazakh eagle hunters of the Altai pictured here.

**The Adventure Game (Sandstone Press – sandstonepress.com – £25) © Keith Partridge, 2015; adventurecamera.co.uk**



# 360°



V i e w f i n d e r











## DAKAR DASH

### Dakar, Senegal

Photographer: **Nichole Sobecki**

Dakar doesn't appear in many glossy travel pieces, but an itinerary around the Senegalese capital – taking in its fragrant and spicy market (pictured) – is a typical inclusion for the *New York Times*' popular *36 Hours* series. Taschen's table-straining three-book compendium *NYT. 36 Hours. World* collects together the three gloriously plush volumes of the series so far, which now adds up to 365 short-break ideas for everywhere from Antwerp to Adelaide, from Winnipeg to Wellington and, of course, Dakar.

**NYT. 36 Hours. World (Taschen, £64)** is available on the iBookstore and Amazon. [www.taschen.com](http://www.taschen.com)











## GO NOW...

### K2, Pakistan

Photographer: **Alireza Teimoury/Dreamstime**  
In Pakistan's rugged north, three mountain ranges meet: the Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindu Kush. Here lie peaks such as the world's second-highest, K2 (pictured, with Broad Peak), and Nanga Parbat. This territory has been deemed offlimits to trekkers since ten foreign climbers were killed at Nanga Parbat base camp in 2013. However, trips to the lofty region are resuming this year with a handful of tour operators (keep a look out in the magazine), so you have the chance to pitch your tent under these mighty mountains once more.

**Pakistan is one of our 13 wildest frontiers worth visiting now. Want to know the other 12? Turn to p106**



# 12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your August essentials: Papua New Guinea at its best; Kate Adie's adventures; Hiroshima – 70 years on; fire up your southern American barbecues

# 1

■ Travel issues

## Iconic sights aren't always what they seem

As the French open a replica of a fragile cave to help preserve the real one, we ask: can a copy ever match up to the original?

**B**ack in 1994 1,000 Paleolithic cave paintings – detailing bears, woolly rhinoceros and mammoths – were discovered in France's Ardèche gorge. Deemed too precious for public access, the Chauvet Cave was closed off and a full-size replica built, which opened in April 2015.

The Vallon-Pont-d'Arc cave ([lacavernedupontdarc.org](http://lacavernedupontdarc.org)), the world's largest replica, is an attempt to protect the unique original; it even has the same humidity, smells and temperature as Chauvet.

But does an imitation offer the same experience as the real thing? No, reckons Peter Sommer, founder of Peter Sommer Travel ([petersommer.com](http://petersommer.com)), which specialises in archaeological trips. “You can build amazing replicas but you'd be separating it from its original place and its whole reason for being.”

A case in point is a replica of the Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee, built back in 1897, says Peter. “When you visit the real thing in

Greece, you get a sense of what it must have been like to be an Athenian.”

Copies of landmarks continue to be built. An imitation Taj Mahal was completed in Bangladesh in 2014, and there are plans for a Falconcity of Wonders in Dubai, a theme park of icons including the Seven Wonders of the World, Eiffel Tower and Leaning Tower of Pisa.

So can replicas be useful alternatives? Yes, says Lisa Ackerman of the World Monuments Fund ([wmf.org](http://wmf.org)), an organisation dedicated to safeguarding historic sites. “They provide an opportunity to learn about places that are too fragile to be visited. They can evoke spatial relationships and offer people a glimpse of the character of an inaccessible site,” says Lisa.

“But with digital technology there are many ways to present the experience of visiting places,” Lisa adds. “Replicas represent just one tool available for presenting historic sites; as with all tools, they must be used judiciously.”

**‘You can build amazing replicas but you would be separating it from its original place and its whole reason for being’**





**Accept no imitations?**  
The genuine Parthenon  
– we think – looks out  
over Athens

## ■ The Nitty Gritty Changed faces

**Five landmarks that have been tinkered with over time**

**1 Grimspound, Dartmoor** This settlement dates back to 1300BC – but you're not necessarily looking at Bronze Age handiwork here. The Victorians controversially reconstructed some of its 24 huts in the late 19th century.

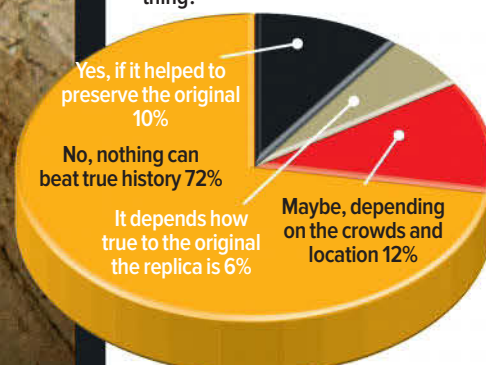
**2 Temple of Isis, Egypt** Perched on the island of Philae, this temple (dating from around 300BC) was painstakingly moved from its original location to higher ground in the 1960s after the construction of the Aswan Dam.

**3 Machu Picchu, Peru** Over the past century the ruins of the Incan Lost City have been fiddled with: a third of Machu Picchu's outlying buildings have been reconstructed, and modifications continue to this day.

**4 Forbidden City, China** If Beijing's historic site is on your bucket list, make sure you visit the right one. In the town of Hengdian, a giant film studio has built a replica of it. Not only that, a copy of the old Summer Palace was opened there recently, too.

**5 Peruvian Andes** Ah, the sublime snow-capped Andes. Or are they? The peak of Chalon Sombbrero, 100km west of Ayacucho, has actually been painted white to reflect the sun, part of a project attempting to save receding glaciers.

■ Online reader poll  
Would you choose to visit a replica of a landmark instead of the real thing?





New Routes

## GO NOW...



**PNG party**  
The country's tribes  
get together for  
sing-sing gatherings

## 2 Papua New Guinea in August is at its most dazzling and diverse

### ? Why go?

Papua New Guinea is one of the most diverse countries on the planet. From the abundance of wildlife that lives in its reefs and rainforests to the 800-odd dialects spoken by its people, the South Pacific nation is big on different. Even its motto is 'Unity in Diversity'.

With one of PNG's biggest festivals being staged this month, there's no better time to discover the multitude of cultures and creatures the

country has to offer. The annual Mount Hagen Cultural Show (15-16 August) is one of PNG's largest tribal gatherings – known as *sing-sings*. Over 100 groups will perform at the festival, in an eclectic mix of colourful costumes, chanting and traditional dancing.

Initially set up in 1961 to help unify the nation's tribes before the country was granted independence from Australia in 1975, the show is now more welcoming to travellers.

Away from the beating drums and warrior dances, visit the Baiyer River Wildlife Sanctuary, north of Mount Hagen, to see legendary birds of paradise, the world's only poisonous bird and the planet's smallest parrot. Or dive among coral reefs and Second World War wrecks at Madang and Rabaul.

Hagen, is an idyllic guesthouse overlooking the jungle canopy that puts you within touching distance of nature. Rooms from US\$80 (£52) per night.

### ✈ Get there now!

There are no direct UK-Papua New Guinea flights. One option is to fly to Singapore via Dubai with Emirates, before flying with Air Niugini to Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea's capital. Fares start from around £1,387 return.

### 🏠 Where to stay?

Set amid lush rainforest, the Magic Mountain Lodge, a 30-minute drive west of Mount

Gear

### 3 PACK THIS...



**Mountain Hardware Scrambler 30** £85, [mountainhardware.com](http://mountainhardware.com)  
Most rucksacks aren't waterproof. To make them so means buying a cover or using drybags inside to protect your gear. But this is different. The pack's 100%-waterproof OutDry technology means you don't have to worry in the rain. And, as it's built for scrambling, it has a nice, simple, streamlined design perfect for travelling.

Cinema

### 4 WATCH THIS...



**The Salt of the Earth**  
Out in cinemas, 17 July  
Sebastião Salgado is one of the planet's most celebrated photographers, thanks to his dramatic images of the globe's trouble spots. Now the lens has turned and he's the subject of this documentary: filmmakers Juliano Ribeiro Salgado (his son) and Wim Wenders trace Sebastião's career and Genesis project, which took him across the planet.

Clothing

### 5 BUY THIS...



**Rohan Tian Shirt Print**  
£57, [rohan.co.uk](http://rohan.co.uk)  
It's hard to find a technical travel shirt that doesn't look too utilitarian, but that's where the new Tian excels. Made from wicking fabric (which moves sweat away from the skin) with Biteguard™ (protection against biting insects), a UPF rating of 20+ and a Mandarin collar, it can be dressed up or down. Very versatile.



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# EAT THIS.



6

## It's time to fire up the barbie, US style

### TOP TIP

Medium lobsters (about 700g) are best for grilling: smaller lobsters cook too quickly and don't have enough time to take on a char; large lobsters yield tougher meat.

Americans are fiercely proud of their barbecues. Few nations have invested more time in the pursuit of the perfect dry rub, the most lip-smacking glaze or the best wood for smoking. Anyone travelling through the country – especially if you're taking it slow by road – should be prepared to express an opinion on their coals.

In the south, barbecue 'cook offs' are an integral part of the cultural calendar and regional competition is fierce. "Barbecue is to Americans as beer is to Germans," says Joe Carroll, owner of Brooklyn barbecue joint Fette Sau and co-author of *Feeding The Fire*. "Any German thinks the best beer comes from his hometown and everything else is poison. The same goes for barbecue in America."

In Texas barbecue means beef, sauces are frowned upon and the spice rub is king. Memphis and the Carolinas are famed for their hog roasts and pulled-pork sandwiches, while Kansas City is synonymous with a tangy, sticky-sweet basting glaze. Outside of these four key regions, you'll encounter countless other ingredients and techniques. In Western Kentucky, barbecued mutton is a speciality; inhabitants of Maryland swear by their pit beef; along the eastern seaboard it's common to find seafood sizzling on the grill.

Indeed, if you're visiting near Rockland, Maine, residents will be firing up for the Maine Lobster Festival (29 July-2 August), preparing simple recipes like the one on the right: classic grilled lobster, served lightly charred and glistening with garlic butter.

### GRILLED LOBSTER

#### Serves 2 to 4

2 live medium lobsters (700g each) – or just buy them ready to cook  
110g melted garlic butter  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper  
½ lemon, plus 4 lemon wedges  
30g chopped parsley  
Flaky sea salt, such as Maldon

#### Method

1. Prepare a medium-hot single-level fire in the grill.
2. To quickly kill the lobsters (if bought live), place one lobster on a cutting board with its head facing you. Insert the tip of a large chef's knife into the lobster's back about 2.5cm behind its eyes, then plunge the knife down to split its head between the eyes. Turn the lobster around and split it in half through the back and tail. Scoop out and discard the dark green roe and the pale green tomalley. Crack the claws by whacking them with the back of the chef's knife. Repeat with the other lobster.
3. Brush the flesh of the lobster halves with some of the garlic butter, and season with kosher salt and pepper. Place the lobsters flesh side down on the grill and cook until charred (about 3 minutes). Turn them over, brush the flesh with butter, and continue grilling and basting with butter until the flesh side is opaque and firm to the touch (3-5 mins longer).
4. Transfer the lobsters to a platter and squeeze the lemon half over them. Sprinkle with parsley and flaky salt, and serve with lemon wedges and any leftover butter.

Excerpted from *Feeding the Fire: Recipes & Strategies For Better Barbecue & Grilling* by Joe Carroll and Nick Fauchald (Artisan Books, 2015; £20). Photographs by William Hereford.



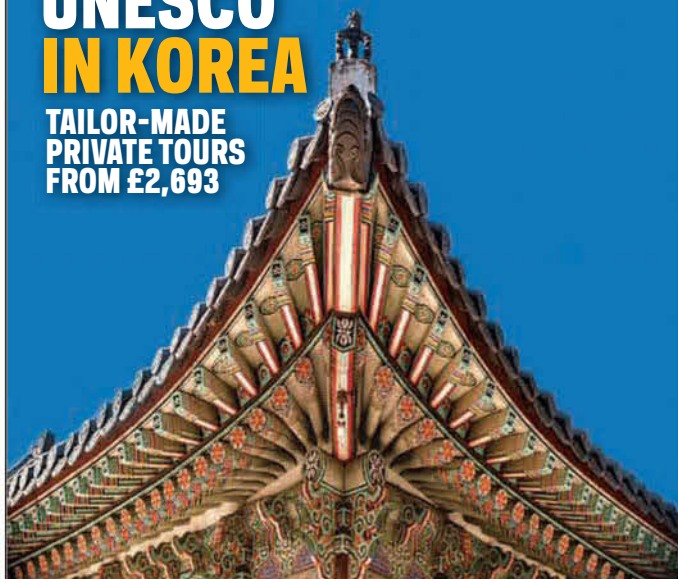




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## 7

■ Five minutes with...

# KATE ADIE TRAVELS IN THE DANGER ZONE

'We can't start the war yet: Kate Adie hasn't turned up!' – the legendarily fearless BBC reporter tells us about travel to the frontlines

## Do you like to travel?

I suppose I take it as part of life. I come from a generation in which there were a great number of opportunities available for young people with InterRailing and student cards – the idea was you grabbed a couple of friends, a guitar and off you go.

## Where did you end up?

I took a year out of university and travelled 1,100km north of Stockholm to work in the sub-Arctic Circle. The temperature often fell to -48°C and I was skiing to school. It was utterly beautiful but it was also extremely tough – you had to be careful of the weather because it could kill you.

## With your job, you've often ended up in destinations that could kill you...

I had no choice whatsoever. The whole business of being a reporter was being one of the team; the next one along the line went to a certain story. Frequently they said: "You go there and if you don't know anything about the place, learn on the way".

## Was there a place that you thought was particularly dangerous?

I spent lots of time in Bosnia, which was an immensely dangerous place because of the illogical and random nature of violence. Neighbours killed each other; a small village could erupt for no apparent reason. People lashed out in all directions – and that would include at journalists.

## You've been back to Bosnia. It must be strange revisiting areas where you saw some truly terrible things?

Only up to a point, because most of the places you were reporting from involved an immense amount of driving around beautiful landscapes and you'd think, this is enchanting. Going to Sri Lanka, there were extremely difficult conflicts going on and the most extraordinary, ferocious violence,



and you thought, how can this happen in such a beautiful place?

## Did you enjoy your travels?

Of course! If I hadn't, I probably would have had to kill myself! When I started there was a genuine sense of adventure – you went to the sort of airport where your aircraft had to fly over the control tower to wake them up!

If you read old travel books, by the Victorians and the Edwardians, they would tell you it was far more exciting and romantic back then. But even so, there were times where we went to places where I thought, what on earth are we doing here?

## Are there bits of the planet you'd still like to see?

Yes, lots. But I'm not the sort of person to have a bucket list. There are lots of places, though I prefer to have a bed rather than sleeping on the ground, and I prefer for people not to try and get a sniper bullet past you when you come out of a door.

There are lots of places – and they are not always the famous places. You suddenly find yourself very unexpectedly thinking, this is lovely. I was the generation after the reporting of Vietnam; they all used to say that between the awfulness they could not avoid the fact that it was one of the most wrenchingly beautiful places. So I have been

to Vietnam and they were absolutely right – it was a very beautiful place.

## How do you feel now that travel is so widespread and affordable?

It is lucky that people can travel. One can bang on about, gosh, how it has changed, but life changes. People should grab the opportunity to travel. It is still possible to discover places where life is very different.

## You work with the charity Farm Africa in Kenya and Ethiopia – why?

I support Farm Africa because it is an immensely practical organisation. If you're a journalist you've seen an enormous amount of towns where completely pointless aid seems to be wasted or goes into the pockets of corrupt politicians. With many charities – Farm Africa being one of them – the aid goes directly to the farmers and the people in the villages. There is no middle man, which I think is hugely important.

## Your latest book, *Fighting on the Home Front*, is about women's lives in the UK during the First World War. Are there bits of the UK that you especially like?

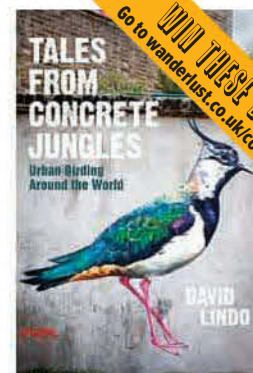
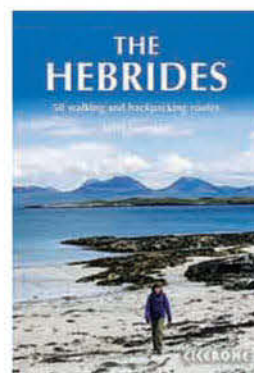
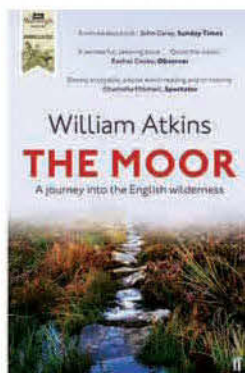
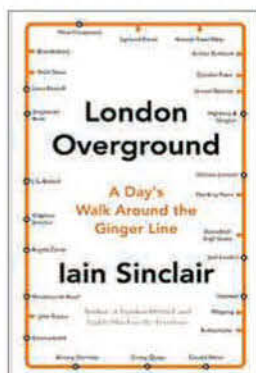
I've been lucky in my job because it literally took me from Land's End, where there was an enormous disaster, up to the Shetlands, where I was doing a story on an oil rig. I literally criss-crossed the country; it was an absolutely magical way of getting to know it.

## Is there a place you'd recommend?

I grew up in an industrial town in the north-east. When I was a child we went into the Dales, Northumberland, the Lake District and Scotland. We had a little Austin car and off we trotted at weekends. I am always staggered when I hear of someone who hasn't been to Scotland.

***Fighting on the Home Front* (Hodder Paperbacks, £9) is out now**





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■ Read this...

# 8 Summer reads to make your feet itch

Urban birds, Tube treks, tea investigations and the tourist/traveller debate

As summer arrives, so do books reimagining the joys of UK travel. For starters, Iain Sinclair treks the 'ginger line': **London Overground** (Hamish Hamilton, £17), which takes him and his 'rambling companion' – arty filmmaker Andrew Kötting – on an arresting tramp though the grimy city's grimmer literary, philosophical and social history.

London also features on Dixie Wills itinerary as he steps into the big, bad black for **At Night** (AA, £17). Wills navigates the nocturnal UK – Galloway Forest Park, Sherwood Forest, Skomer Island, Dartmoor – casting a hazy light on familiar travel experiences.

Dartmoor also gets a chapter in **The Moor** (Faber & Faber, £10, paperback ed), which sees William Atkins pursue the myth and mystery of these brooding tracts of the UK, looking at why they continue to fire the furnaces of our cultural imagination. It'll leave your feet itchy, but just as likely to send you to your bookshelves as the heaths.

Cicerone's new guide to **The Hebrides** (£19) virtually packs your bags for you. Peter Edwards' bulky planner should steer visitors safely around the archipelago, with 50 routes – from easy wanders to more hardcore trails – meticulously mapped out.

'Urban Birder' David Lindo continues to preach his message of accessible birding with **Tales From Concrete Jungles** (Bloomsbury, £15). It's a hugely energising tome, recasting travel-frowned concrete slabs of the UK (Southend, Middlesbrough, Tyneside) and some global stop-offs as secret tweety paradises. Meanwhile, for the experienced twitcher, Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne's **A Naturalist's Guide To The Birds Of Sri Lanka** (John Beaufoy, £10) is essential for anyone about to immerse themselves in this teardrop-shaped birding nirvana.

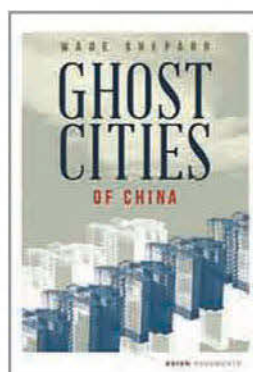
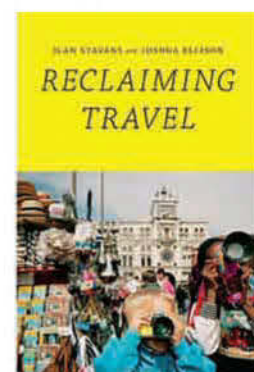
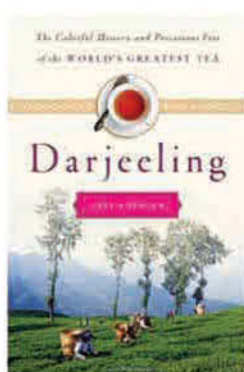
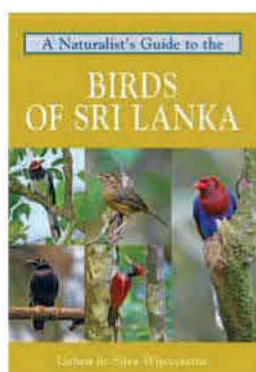
Tea paradise lies further north. Darjeeling's crop has played a huge part in its role as a colonial hub and romanticised travel spot. Jeff Koehler's **Darjeeling** (Bloomsbury, £20)

rambles through these hills and their history, and the serious issues facing their future.

Taking a more nostalgic view on roaming colonials is **On The Nile** (AUC Press, £30), a history of tourism 'in the golden age of travel'. Andrew Humphreys collects the tales, the realities and a rather glorious archive of posters and sepia-hued pictures.

The difference between travellers and tourists has long been argued on the *Wanderlust* website forum, and is now the subject of Ilan Stavans and Joshua Ellison's thesis, **Reclaiming Travel** (Duke Uni Press, £16). Muse on their meditations and feel smug/affirmed/annoyed (delete as applicable).

There's no doubt on which side of the debate Wade Shepard falls. In **Ghost Cities Of China** (Zed Books, £15) he tramps the empty streets of new citadels designed to one day house the world's largest population. An eye-opening social, political and geographical look at a country reimagining itself for the summers – and winters – to come.





# 9 What's On UK EVENTS

## ADVENTURE TRAVEL FILM FESTIVAL

London, 14-16 Aug

[www.adventuretravelfilmfestival.com](http://www.adventuretravelfilmfestival.com)

Mill Hill School, The Ridgeway, NW7 1QS. Weekend camping tickets from £76 (£115 including meals).

Watch epic journeys on screen, learn how to transform your adventure into a movie (from planning a narrative to film directing) and hear *Wanderlust*'s Phoebe Smith give her top travel writing tips. This year's theme is the Lost Art of Hitch-hiking, with a guest appearance from André Brugiroux, who hitched across the world in the 1960s and 70s. If that's not enough, there is a packed programme of creative workshops in bushcraft, campfire cooking, knots and yoga with like-minded travellers.



**E**ver fancied thumbing a free ride into uncharted territory – but never had the nerve? Or jacking in the job to cross a continent by horse/motorbike/unicycle? The Adventure Travel Film Festival (ATFF) aims to inspire travellers who dream by showing films by travellers that have *done*, including some of the maddest expeditions ever undertaken.

### Find fun on film

The ATFF's film programme allows you to ride, drive, fly and paddle into the great unknown, with a band of extreme journeyers as your guides. Enjoy outdoor starlight screenings or head to the cinema tent. New for this year is the *Wanderlust* 'video postcards' series – inspiring short films that provide lovely little flashes of faraway lands.

### Learn some tips

The festival is also ideal for picking up advice. Festival curator Austin Vince, who's been making adventure movies for 20 years, will be running a free filmmaking workshop. For more specialist advice, a number of other clinics (£20 each) will cover topics such as editing, telling narratives, directing and camera work in greater detail.

*Wanderlust*'s editor Phoebe Smith will be running an Introduction to Travel Writing workshop (£30) for budding scribblers, packed with tips on how to plan, structure and pen your trip of a lifetime. A second seminar from *Wanderlust* will focus on Publishing Your Adventure (£30). This will cover the art of creating the perfect magazine pitch, getting your tale in print and how to create a successful blog or book.

### And there's more...

And there's more. You can quiz hardy hitch-hikers, get tips from global circumnavigators and ask advice from explorers who've used all sorts of transportation to see the world. All will be on hand to answer your questions. The poster-boy of this year's festival is 77-year-old hitchhiker André Brugiroux, who'll be talking about travelling to every country on the planet.

You can also learn bushcraft skills from instructor Kevan Palmer, who's provided survival advice to Bear Grylls; get tangled up at the Jolly Woodsman Knot Workshop; and have a crack at the Campfire Cookout Competition – the ATFF's answer to the *Great British Bake Off*.

[www.adventuretravelfilmfestival.com](http://www.adventuretravelfilmfestival.com)

## WIN A PAIR OF ATFF TICKETS!

Want to watch movies and find adventurous inspiration for free? We've got a pair of ATFF tickets to give away to one lucky reader. Just answer the question below to be in with a chance:

**Q:** One of the highlights of the Adventure Travel Film Festival are its Starlight Screenings. Which movie is this year's Festival's special Friday night Starlight Screening?

- a) Gold of Bengal
- b) South To South
- c) Into The Sea

To enter (and terms and conditions), go to [wanderlust.co.uk/competitions](http://wanderlust.co.uk/competitions) or send your answer, along with your name and contact info to *Wanderlust* (p2) marked 'ATFF'. Closing date for entries is 5 August 2015. Please state 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.







### READER OFFER!

You can receive a hardback copy of Mark Carwardine's *Ultimate Wildlife Experiences* for only £15. To purchase, call 01753 620426 and quote MCB00K or head to [www.wanderlust.co.uk/MCB00K](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/MCB00K)

Subject to availability. Offer is £20 if shipping overseas. Offer ends 12/08/15

### BIRDFAIR

Rutland, 21-23 Aug

[www.birdfair.org.uk](http://www.birdfair.org.uk)

Rutland Water Nature Reserve, Egleton, LE15 8BT. Day tickets £13.50; 3-day ticket £31.50. Concessions are available.

The Rutland Birdfair has been dubbed birdwatching's answer to Glastonbury – but hopefully with a little less mud. It seems the entire avian-loving industry descends on the glorious Rutland Water Nature Reserve – one of the most important wildfowl sanctuaries in Great Britain, regularly hosting more than 25,000 waterfowl. However, come August the bird-lovers manage to outnumber the birds, gathering to flit amid the hundreds of stands (selling everything from binoculars to Botswana trips) and attend the numerous talks and workshops.

However, you don't need to be a dedicated twitcher to enjoy Birdfair – there's plenty for travellers who have only the faintest interest in our feathered friends. The range of high-profile speakers is top-draw. *Wanderlust* contributor and TV naturalist Mark Carwardine goes wonderfully off-topic, discussing the world of whales – the charismatic speaker will give an amusing, yet thought-provoking talk on his cetacean obsession, including his never-ending mission to capture the perfect photo of Baja California's grey whales.

Bill Oddie will look back at a lifelong love of birds; he's also open to audience questions (no matter how bizarre). Mike Dilger talks about the wildlife on your doorstep. And Simon King presents the British Bird Photography Awards. There are also lectures from urban birder David Lindo, Big Cat diarist Jonathan Scott and even *Wanderlust* editor Phoebe Smith who'll be talking about the UK's wildest places. In short, a magnificent murmuration of a festival!

### WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

London, Until 31 Aug

[www.nhm.ac.uk](http://www.nhm.ac.uk)

Natural History Museum, Cromwell Rd, South Kensington, London SW7 5BD. £12.60.

Last chance to see the world's best wildlife photos before they leave the Natural History Museum, as well as the film telling the story of the competition, in celebration of its 50th year.

### CORAL REEFS: SECRET CITIES OF THE SEAS

London, Until 13 Sept

[www.nhm.ac.uk](http://www.nhm.ac.uk)

Natural History Museum, Cromwell Rd, South Kensington, London SW7 5BD. £10.

There's also not long left to dip into the NHM's underwater-focused exhibition. See 250 sub-aqua specimens and take a virtual dive.

### CAN WE LIVE HERE?

London, 6 Aug

[www.stanfords.co.uk/events](http://www.stanfords.co.uk/events)

Stanfords store, 12-14 Long Acre, Covent Garden, WC2E 9LP, from 6.30pm; £3.

Author Sarah Alderson talks about her new book, *Can We Live Here?* – part travel memoir, part job-quitting guide. She will read excerpts from the book, which tells the story of her eight-month worldwide search for a family home for herself, her husband and her three-year-old daughter.

### BRISTOL INTERNATIONAL BALLOON FIESTA

Bristol, 6-9 Aug

[www.bristolballoonfiesta.co.uk](http://www.bristolballoonfiesta.co.uk)

Ashton Court Estate, BS8 3TQ. Free.

Float about in the West Country! Watch the magical sight of myriad balloons taking flight, as well as enjoying live music and 'gurt lush' local food.

### GLOBETROTTERS CLUB

Chester, 15 Aug

[chesterglobetrotters.co.uk](http://chesterglobetrotters.co.uk)

The Eagle, 18 Castle Street, CH1 2DS. Meeting is free and starts at 2pm. Contact 01244 638026 or [chesterbranch@globetrotters.co.uk](mailto:chesterbranch@globetrotters.co.uk).

The Chester Globetrotters hold a social meeting on the third Saturday of every other month. Fellow adventurers can chat about the latest events, swap tales of adventure and share information about the latest travel news.

### AFRICAN PERCUSSIONS

Gateshead, 19 Aug

[sagegateshead.com](http://sagegateshead.com)

The Sage, Gateshead NE8 2JR. 1pm; £5. Over 50s only.

Don't know your *djembe* from your *shekere*? Then come along to this lively, bell-jangling workshop, to explore the world of traditional African rhythms – and have a go yourself.

### The Big Debate

# 10 Would you go naked on your travels?

After a group of tourists were fined and jailed for three days for stripping off on a sacred Malaysian mountain, we asked: would you dare to bare on your travels?

## YES



**Rob Howe,**  
*Wanderlust* reader

"They stripped on a mountain away from anyone. Did they anger

the gods? Pfff. I'm inclined to write it up as kids having fun. Social decency and respect? I hear that, but I feel that can also be read as maintaining a set of cultural anachronisms that are outdated. I normally find a nudist beach if I should feel like a dip, and I'd have no hesitation stripping off elsewhere if I thought it was appropriate. However, you'd really not want to upset people if possible, so I won't be walking naked around the Prado anytime soon."

## NO



**Rachelle Meilleur,**  
*Wanderlust* reader

"Going skinny dipping on a deserted beach is one thing, posing naked

at a sacred/cultural/iconic site is something completely different. I really don't understand the need for young, mostly Western foreign tourists to bare all in public – Machu Picchu, the Malaysian mountain, etc.

In some ways this new fad – or whatever you want to call it – is not only narcissistic, like the use of selfie sticks, it is also a bit neo-imperialistic: 'I've spent a lot of money to travel to a "lesser" country than mine so I can do whatever the hell I want.'

Would we be so accepting if tourists posed naked in front of Buckingham Palace? The *Mona Lisa*? Auschwitz? I know I'm going to sound like an old fart here, but what happened to common social decency and respect, regardless of where you are?"





Instant Expert

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The Genbaku Dome was just 160m from the A-bomb's epicentre



11

It's been 70 years since the A-bomb hit Hiroshima – go now and explore the regenerated Japanese city's chilling yet fascinating past

**A**t 8.15am on 6 August 1945, a B-29 bomber dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, an important port and the headquarters of the Japanese Second General Army. It's estimated that 140,000 people were killed as a result of the blast and the ensuing radiation. Three days later a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. On 15 August, Japan surrendered. It was the first – and last – time nuclear weapons have ever been used in warfare.

This is grim stuff indeed, but it makes a visit to this now-thriving city in western Honshu quite unique.

## Did anything survive?

The bomb destroyed over 60% of Hiroshima's buildings, reducing the city to rubble and scorched earth. The only building near the hypocentre of the blast to survive was the Genbaku Dome (*above*), which once housed

the Hiroshima Commercial Exhibition Hall. In the years following the bomb, this lone ruin became a subject of controversy – some locals saw it as an all-too-painful reminder and wanted it torn down; others felt it should stand as both memorial and warning, to ensure such tragedies never happened again.

## What is Hiroshima like today?

Today, a Japanese metropolis has risen from the ashes, but the past has not been forgotten. The Genbaku Dome, which was reinforced by specialists in 1970, stands at the edge of Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park. The park marks A-bomb ground zero. Here, a cenotaph stands, in memory of the victims; nearby is the Flame of Peace, which will only be extinguished when the world is free of nuclear weapons. There is also the Children's Monument, surrounded by offerings of paper cranes, and the chilling

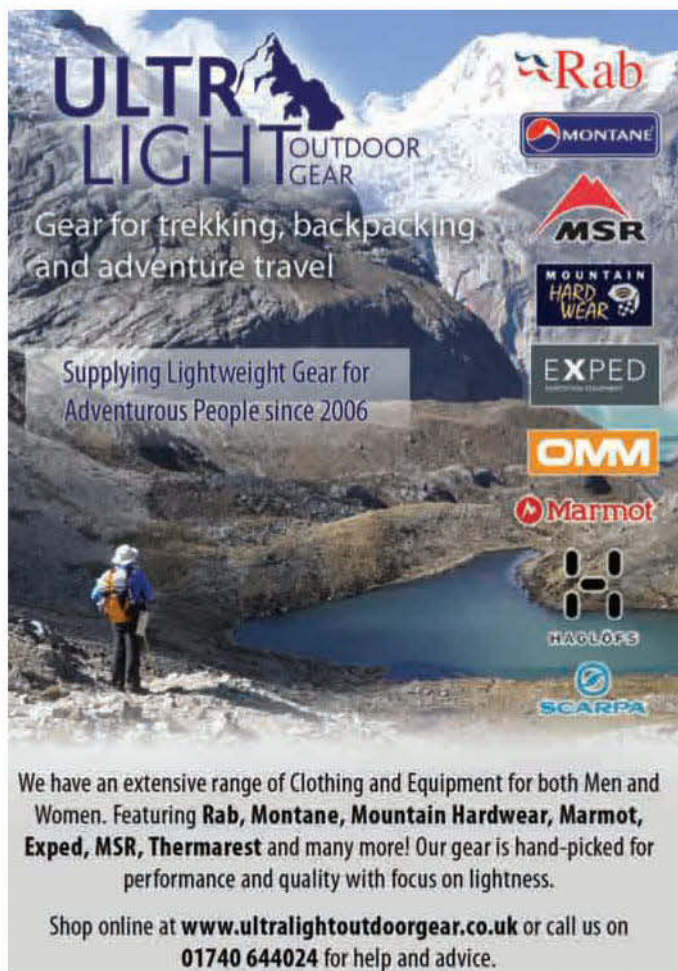
Memorial Mound, which contains the ashes of tens of thousands of the people who were incinerated on the spot.

At the park's centre, the Peace Memorial Museum illustrates the impact of the explosion with photo and video displays. Five minutes walk away, a plaque on the wall of Shima Hospital marks the exact point where the bomb exploded, 580m above.

## Is there anything else I should see?

For a complete contrast, head to serene Miyajima Island. The connecting ferry port to this UNESCO World Heritage site is just 30 minutes from Hiroshima – trams leave right from the Peace Park. On Miyajima, you can climb the forested slopes of Mount Misen, spot the tame deer and visit the ancient Itsukushima Shrine with its *torii* arch, which stands in the bay and appears to float on the water.





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# 12 TRAVEL OFF-SEASON

Be Inspired



1



9



8



7



2



3



4



5



6

Off-season doesn't necessarily mean *bad* season. Sometimes it can be worth putting up with a bit of 'weather' or hardship in order to experience the best wildlife encounters, a natural phenomena, better photos, lower prices or simply smaller crowds. So don't dismiss going where everyone else isn't – and here are nine trips to prove that 'off' can mean well and truly on...

## PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try Wanderlust's Trip Finder: [mytripfinder.co.uk](http://mytripfinder.co.uk)

### 1. Finland

See the aurora in warmer weather

The Aurora Zone's new *Autumn Aurora Hunt* in Torassieppi may seem off season but there are bonuses to travelling during the *ruska*. The lack of snow means darker skies – all the better for aurora, which you might see reflected in as-yet unfrozen lakes. Plus warmer climes not only make it more comfy but mean the wildlife is more active. There's also lots of daylight for visits to a reindeer farm and husky centre, and hikes in Pallas National Park.

**Who:** The Aurora Zone (01670 785012, [theaurorazone.com](http://theaurorazone.com))

**When:** 22 Oct, 5 Nov 2015

**How long:** 4 nights

**How much:** From £1,045 (incl flights)

### 2. Burma

Glimpse the Golden Land – in green

Experience the lush-green of Burma's wet season on **Mountain Kingdoms' Golden Trails of Burma** tour. A perfect time for photographs, the rains are irregular and you can still balloon over Bagan, explore the sites around Mandalay, and visit the floating villages of Inle Lake. Visits to sights such as Shwedagon Pagoda and the iconic U Bein bridge will be timed to avoid the crowds, and supplemented by offbeat walks.

**Who:** Mountain Kingdoms (01453 844400, [mountainkingdoms.com](http://mountainkingdoms.com))

**When:** 31 Oct, 14 Nov & 19 Dec

**How long:** 16 days

**How much:** From £2,890 (incl flights)



### 3. Bolivia

See the salt plains shimmer

Watch one of the world's natural wonders come to life: November-March may be wetter in Bolivia but it's when a layer of water sits on the Uyuni salt flats, making for great photos. **Audley's Classic Bolivia** tour heads to Uyuni and beyond – from its flamingo lagoons to colonial Sucre, the mining city of Potosí and capital La Paz.

**Who:** Audley (01993 838645, [audleytravel.com](http://audleytravel.com))

**When:** Nov-Mar

**How long:** 12 days

**How much:** From £3,945 (incl flights)

### 4. Costa Rica

Spot flora and fauna galore

Enjoy the jungle at its lushest on **Tucan Travel's Costa Rica Encompassed** tour. 'Emerald' season is the best time to spy nesting green turtles at Tortuguero, plus there's leafy abundance and atmospheric mistiness at Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve and cracking sub-aqua life in Cahuita National Park.

**Who:** Tucan Travel (0800 8048435, [tucantravel.com](http://tucantravel.com))

**When:** Jul-Oct

**How long:** 14 days

**How much:** From £1,059 (excl flights)

### 5. Maldives

Dive with rays and sharks

Travel to the Indian Ocean during the wet season: the best time to see whale sharks and manta rays, minus the tourist crowds.

**Dive Worldwide's Dive Baa Atoll** trip lets you choose from over 35 dive sites, all of which seldom see other divers; plus you'll stay amid a cluster of uninhabited isles.

**Who:** Dive Worldwide (01962 302087, [diveworldwide.com](http://diveworldwide.com))

**When:** May-Oct

**How long:** 10 days

**How much:** From £2,295 (incl flights)

### 6. Russia

Take in snow-covered sights

See St Petersburg at its sparkliest on a **Regent Holidays' St Petersburg Short Break** in winter. The city never looks picture-postcard prettier than under a dusting of snow; and it's cheaper too. Visit the Hermitage Museum, the palaces of Tsarskoe Selo and other historic gems.

**Who:** Regent Holidays (020 7666 1244, [regent-holidays.co.uk](http://regent-holidays.co.uk))

**When:** Dec-Mar

**How long:** 6 days

**How much:** From £995 (incl flights)

### 7. Kenya, Uganda & Rwanda

Gawp at gorillas – for less

Travel on **Oasis Overland's Gorillas and Gameparks** tour in April/May and save: in these off-peak months, a gorilla-trekking permit is £225 cheaper! The Oasis trip starts and ends in Nairobi, and offers the chance to tick-off East African gameparks, Nile cruising, white-water rafting and, of course, close-up gorilla encounters.

**Who:** Oasis Overland (01963 530113, [oasisoverland.co.uk](http://oasisoverland.co.uk))

**When:** Apr-May

**How long:** 19 days

**How much:** From £495, plus US\$295 local payment (excl flights and permit)

### 8. Peru & Bolivia

Try another route to Machu Picchu

The classic Inca Trail closes for February, but you can still hike to Machu Picchu in this off-season month on **Dragoman's Andes & Amazon Cuzco-La Paz** tour, which takes an alternative route. You'll also visit Puno, Lake Titicaca and La Paz.

**Who:** Dragoman (01728 885572, [dragoman.com](http://dragoman.com))

**When:** 10 & 14 Feb 2016

**How long:** 12 days

**How much:** From £435, plus US\$830 kitty (excl flights)

### 9. Zambia

Mess about on the river

**Wildlife Worldwide's Rivers & Rainbows** tour operates just at the end of the rains, when the Luangwa River is high – the only time boat safaris run. The river is bursting with life, while leopard, elephants and other game thrive on its banks, as do 450 species of birds. Night drives and treks are available too.

**Who:** Wildlife Worldwide (01962 302086, [wildlifeworldwide.com](http://wildlifeworldwide.com))

**When:** Jan-Apr **How long:** 11 days

**How much:** £3,495 (incl flights)

 **MORE ONLINE** Have these off-season ideas got you thinking? Want to see more top trip options? Then go to [wanderlust.co.uk/158](http://wanderlust.co.uk/158)

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# SOUTH AMERICA

## T R I P   P L A N N E R

Whether you want to hike the Andes, self-drive Brazil, delve into the Guianas or take the train to Machu Picchu, these eight journeys will inspire a Latin adventure

WORDS **CHRIS MOSS**





## South America Trip Planner

**M**inimum planning, overstuffed rucksacks and financial ruin might not sound like ideal preparation for a hike across the Patagonian Andes, but sometimes you just know you have to try.

We'd hardened our calf muscles on soft hikes around the Los Alerces National Park. We'd soothed them in the lakes – where my friend Mike found himself floating in the middle of his budget (his stash of pesos slipped out of his shorts pocket; we dried some, and laughed it off). And we'd bought cheap tetra-pak wine for our evening camp dinners.

The path from Argentina's Lago Puelo into Chile was – we were told – long but easy to follow. There were customs HQs on either side of the frontier, and there was plenty of water. We could get to the Pacific Ocean in six days, and there was plenty of space for wild camping – the only kind

worth doing – and the Andes were, at this latitude, very low.

Amazingly, it was all true. We set off on a wonderful, map-less, week-long hike along ancient footpaths and oxcart tracks. We slept under the stars, we drifted, we discovered. We bought bread off local farmers, spied deer in the beech forests, worshipped condors above the summits. We ended the trip with a flight in a one-seater, single-prop plane – tickets \$10 each – past a volcano and in to the coastal town of Cochamó.

It was not necessarily my best ever South American trip. But the Andes crossing was memorable not only because I went with a best friend. It taught me that South America is beautiful, friendly, full of unspoiled wilderness, and that it rewards impulses and self-propulsion. All the itineraries below have something of the pioneer spirit about them, and I envy you if you've not yet done them. ►





**Open-armed welcome**  
A heavenly spotlight falls  
on Christ the Redeemer,  
as the statue looks over  
Rio de Janeiro







### TOP TIP

Don't fly over all the long hauls – you'll get a powerful sense of South America's landscape and sheer scale on slow, overland journeys.

## ◀ SOUTHERN PATAGONIAN ANDES ARGENTINA & CHILE

**DURATION:** 10 DAYS **BEST FOR:** Hiking, biking, glaciers and off-road adventure

**ROUTE:** El Chaltén • Lago Argentino • Puerto Natales • Torres del Paine

**WHY DO IT?** The southern Patagonian Andes are as spectacular as any landscape in South America. The main mountain chain is relatively low, and two iconic massifs – Fitz Roy and Torres del Paine – provide a backdrop for superb camping and wilderness walking. The best time to go is during the austral summer and shoulder seasons (October to March).

Starting out from the small backpacking hamlet of El Chaltén, it's an eight-hour round trip on a well-marked footpath up to the Laguna de los Tres for a superlative view of Mount Fitz Roy. It's possible to pitch a tent at Campamento Poincenot if you prefer to do this over two days. El Chaltén, while tiny, has some good hotels as well as cool bars and small restaurants.

Getting to Lago Argentino involves a road transfer, taking in a short section of the Ruta 40 – Argentina's most famous highway. Once there, take a good look at the Perito Moreno glacier from the raised walkways, before heading to Puerto Bandera for a boat ride to the glacier's edge; here, put on crampons to explore the edge of the Southern Ice Field.

El Calafate, 50km east of Puerto Bandera, has a range of good-value accommodation



**Nice ice**  
Get up close to the  
Perito Moreno Glacier  
and take a hike in  
Torres del Paine (below)

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and campsites, plenty of good steakhouses and pizzerias, and good connections to other destinations. Estancia-style luxury hotels such as Eolo, Nibepo Aike and Hostería Alta Vista are the more inviting alternatives, if your budget allows.

From El Calafate, take a minibus to cross the Argentina/Chile border at Rio Turbio and, after a pit-stop in lively Puerto Natales, transfer to Torres del Paine where walking options abound. The most popular four/five-day walk is the W circuit (because it looks like a W on the map), which takes in Lago Grey's impressive glacier, the dramatic Valle Frances and, of course, the 'Towers of Paine' – the granitic monoliths used in a thousand brochures.





**Local encounters**  
Meet the Uros  
islanders of Lake  
Titicaca and llamas  
at Machu Picchu







## ◀ INCA HEARTLAND **BOLIVIA & PERU**

**DURATION:** 7-10 DAYS **BEST FOR:** Indigenous culture and cuisine, ancient ruins, short hikes

**ROUTE:** La Paz • Copacabana/Lake Titicaca • Puno-Cuzco • Machu Picchu

**WHY DO IT?** Visit the heartland of the Inca peoples and their descendants, the Quechua and Aymara nations of Bolivia and Peru. Travelling across the *altiplano* (high plain) opens up some of the Andes' most dramatic landscapes – and that thin mountain air will give you dreams worthy of a shaman.



Occupying a wide bowl beneath the Illimani mountain, La Paz is a spectacular city. Here, skyscrapers nuzzle indigenous markets and it's easy to fill up on Andean music and cuisine: healthy quinoa and amaranth, the maize-based drink of *chicha morada*, alpaca meat and grilled guinea pig are all key ingredients of the Incaic menu.

The bus trip to Lake Titicaca passes through the town of Copacabana, a simple lakeside resort with a notable 16th-century basilica; take a day trip out on to the lake – the highest navigable body of water on earth – to hike on the car-free Isla del Sol, site of several pre-Columbian ruins. From Puno, on the Peruvian side of the lake, there are boat trips to the man-made totora-reed islands, built by the indigenous Uros.

PeruRail runs a rail service from Puno to Cuzco, and there are also regular buses. The journey over the altiplano opens up views of distant mountains and volcanoes, bare

deserts and steppe-like plains where vicuña and alpaca graze. Cuzco, the Inca's 'navel of the world', has the region's best hotels, as well as fusion restaurants, cool bars and engrossing museums detailing the compelling local history.

The next step is Machu Picchu itself and unless you're planning on doing the four-day Inca Trail or a longer hike, the best option is to buy a ticket on the Poroy-Aguas Calientes railway, operated by PeruRail, and enjoy the Sacred Valley through one of the big windows of the *Vistadome* train; those after some luxury can opt for the Orient Express-managed *Hiram Bingham* train. ▶

### DID YOU KNOW?

Bolivia had a coast and its own ports (at Antofagasta, Cobija and Tocopilla) until Chile claimed them following the War of the Pacific in 1879-1883.



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**Here be dragons**  
The Galápagos  
Islands are a wildlife  
hotspots – look out  
for land iguanas



### DID YOU KNOW?

Quito was the first city  
to be named a UNESCO World  
Heritage site, in 1978;  
the Galápagos Islands were  
awarded World Heritage  
status in that  
year too.

## ‘UNDER THE VOLCANOES ECUADOR & THE GALÁPAGOS

**DURATION:** 10-14 DAYS **BEST FOR:** Wildlife, landscapes, railways

**ROUTE:** Quito • Valley of the Volcanoes

• Latacunga • Riobamba-Guayaquil

• Galápagos Islands

**WHY DO IT?** The trip from the Ecuadorean highlands down to the balmy coast is a well-trodden one. It can be done by private car or minibus, on a public bus or – since 2013 – aboard a new rail service called the Tren Crucero (a combination of miniature train and proper train), which transports 54 passengers across 450km over four days, allowing for leisurely stops en route.

Quito is an iconic city with a beautiful historic core and some fine museums. Whichever transport option you take from here to the coastal city of Guayaquil, you'll take in: active Cotopaxi and the so-called Valley of the Volcanoes, just south of Quito; the charming market town of Latacunga; Riobamba, with its strong indigenous identity; and Urbina, which at 3,609m above sea level, boasts the country's highest railway station.

Eventually the road/rail descends through the tropical lowlands and the ranching coastal plains to arrive in Guayaquil, a busy, chaotic city, with a wonderful plaza populated by hundreds of iguanas.

It's just under a two-hour flight to the Galápagos, where there are sea and land options for those keen to see the local Big Five: giant tortoise, marine iguana, Galápagos penguin, blue-footed booby and flightless cormorant. Oh, and then there are the land iguanas, red-footed boobies, green turtles, lava lizards... The volcanic islands offer arguably the best wildlife watching outside Africa; how you experience them is a matter of budget.

A three-day stay on Isabela or Santa Cruz islands (both close to the airport) suffices to see the key species but a week-long cruise opens up the marine life and outer islands. ►





# Colombia



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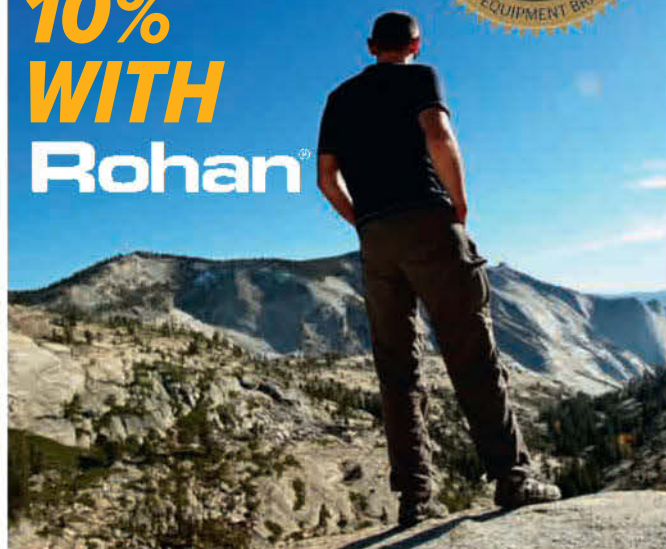
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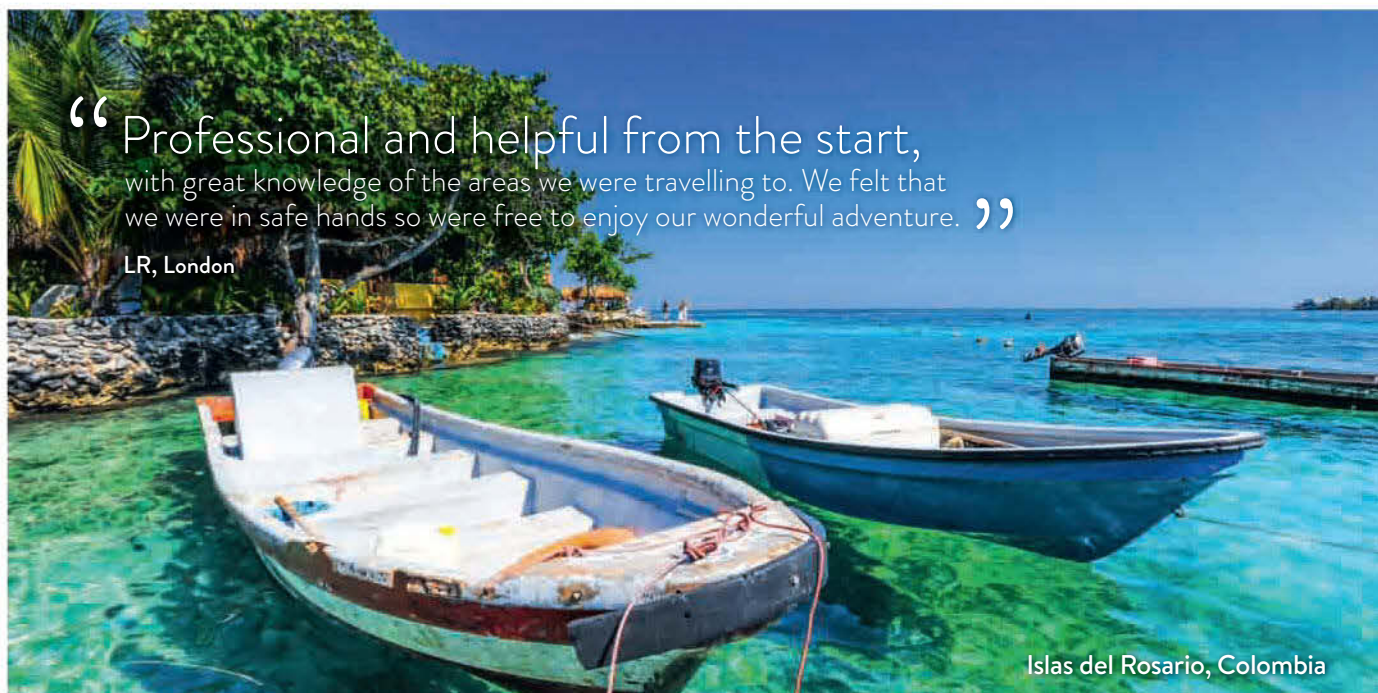
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## ◀ COSTA VERDE **SOUTHERN BRAZIL**

**DURATION: 5 DAYS** **BEST FOR:** Beach culture, gastronomy, colonial architecture, self-drive

**ROUTE:** Santos • Guarujá • Ilhabela • Ubatuba • Catuçaba • Paraty • Ilha Grande • Rio de Janeiro

**WHY DO IT?** If you've got a month free, you can drive Brazil's entire coastline, but the 600km section from Santos to Copacabana beach opens up some of the most beautiful sections of the (threatened) Atlantic forest as well as a convivial town, idyllic islands, a colonial treasure and South America's most romantic city.



**S**antos is famous for two things: having Brazil's biggest port, and for nurturing a footballer named Edson Arantes do Nascimento, aka Pelé – to whom the city's Museu de Futebol, housed in the old FC Santos stadium, is dedicated.

Spend your first night on Guarujá, an attractive island resort, before setting off on your self-drive up the BR101.

The first stop, Ilhabela, reached by ferry, will give you a glimpse of how São Paulo's beautiful people party. At Ubatuba, the road climbs up through the Serra do Mar mountains to Catuçaba, where the local *fazenda* (ranch) allows an opportunity to breathe cooler, cleaner air and kick back with a book – or ride a horse across the hilltops.

Paraty is southern Brazil's prettiest city, combining a picturesque colonial centre – and many boutique hotels – with some beautiful nearby beaches. A favourite with honeymooners, it is swooningly romantic, and the dining is top-notch. Catch the ferry from

Angra dos Reis to Ilha Grande, a completely traffic-free verdant island where there is some easy hiking around the edge of the forest, hopping from beach to beach.

The arrival in Rio is predictably heady, with throbbing traffic and dramatic views of the city's famous favela-clad granite *morros* (hills) until, suddenly, the emblematic – and enticing – beaches appear on the right-hand side: Leblon, Ipanema and Copacabana. ▶

**TOP TIP**  
Don't try using your  
Spanish in Brazil –  
Portuguese or English  
are almost always  
preferred.



**Jungle out there**  
Colombia is birding  
heaven – look out  
for tanagers and  
many other species



## TOP TIP

Pampas or jungle?  
Patagonia or the Andes?  
Atacama or the coast?  
Don't avoid the seemingly flat,  
'empty' places. They often boast  
the most dramatic landscapes  
and bigger – and more  
visible – birdlife.

## ◀ BIRDLIFE ON THE WILD SIDE COLOMBIA

**DURATION: 10 DAYS** **BEST FOR: Birdwatching, wildlife, photography, cities**

**ROUTE:** Bogotá • Chingaza Natural NP •  
Pereira • Jardín • Medellín • Santa Marta

**WHY DO IT?** Colombia boasts a staggering 1,900 bird species – or 18% of the world's species. Even non-specialists can spot a multi-hued array of toucans, tanagers, parrots, woodpeckers, hawks and hummingbirds. But the diversity of avifauna is matched by its landscape: the Andes divides

into three separate chains here, making much of Colombia mountainous; other habitats include Caribbean and Pacific coastlines, Amazon rainforest and the Llanos (plains).

**B**ogotá is one of South America's most underrated capitals, with a super gold museum and, in La Candelaria, a well-preserved historic centre (*right*).

Arrive on a Saturday so you can spend the Sunday cycling on the city's briefly car-free avenues – a much-copied weekly tradition. It's an easy drive north-east to Chingaza NP, which comprises montane forest, lakes and páramo (moorland). Endemic birds include the brown-breasted parakeet, rufous-browed conebill and bronze-tailed thornbill.

A flight up to Pereira allows for a stay in the country's 'coffee triangle'; horseride at a hacienda and enjoy a tasting session. A drive out to Jardín allows a night's stay in this pretty mountain town and an excursion up to the cloud-swathed Yellow-Eared Parrot

Reserve to see that rare bird and many others. Medellín is a thrustingly modern city, famous for its architectural and social innovations.

Fly north to Santa Marta to spend a night on the beach before heading up into the endemic-rich Santa Marta Mountains, perhaps the most popular of all Colombia's birdwatching locations.





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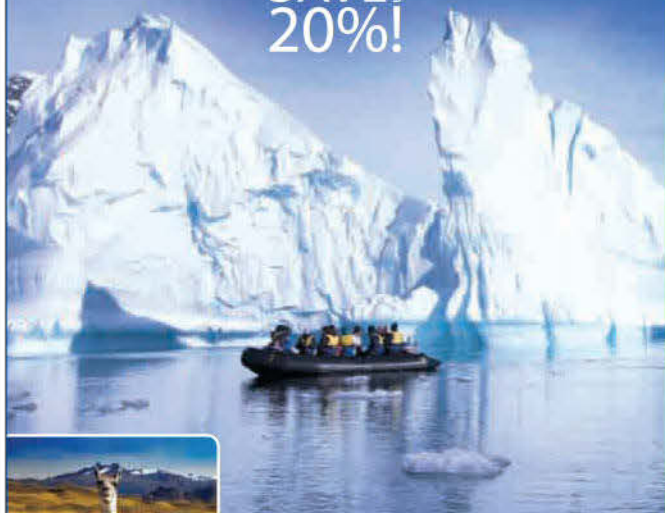
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## ◀ OVERLAND ADVENTURE VENEZUELA & THE GUIANAS

**DURATION: 20 DAYS** **BEST FOR:** Culture and history, birdwatching

**ROUTE:** Ciudad Bolívar • Canaima National Park • Angel Falls-Boa Vista • Atta Rainforest Lodge • Georgetown • Paramaribo • Devil's Island • Cayenne

**WHY DO IT?** A genuine journey of a lifetime, this trip through four of South America's least-visited countries – three of which have very distinctive, non-Hispanic histories – is the perfect combination of quirky sightseeing and intrepid adventure. It also pops into Brazil, just to change buses at Boa Vista.



Venezuela has fallen off the travel radar in recent years, mirroring the country's political and economic isolation during the Chavez and post-Chavez periods. It is, however, relatively straightforward to skip Caracas and fly into Ciudad Bolívar, the point of departure for a short flight and thrilling boat ride up to the bottom of 979m-high Angel Falls, the longest single drop of water in the world. Located among the table-top mountains called *tepui* (which inspired Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*), it's no hardship to repeat the boat-and-plane journey to get back to the airport in order to set off for the east.

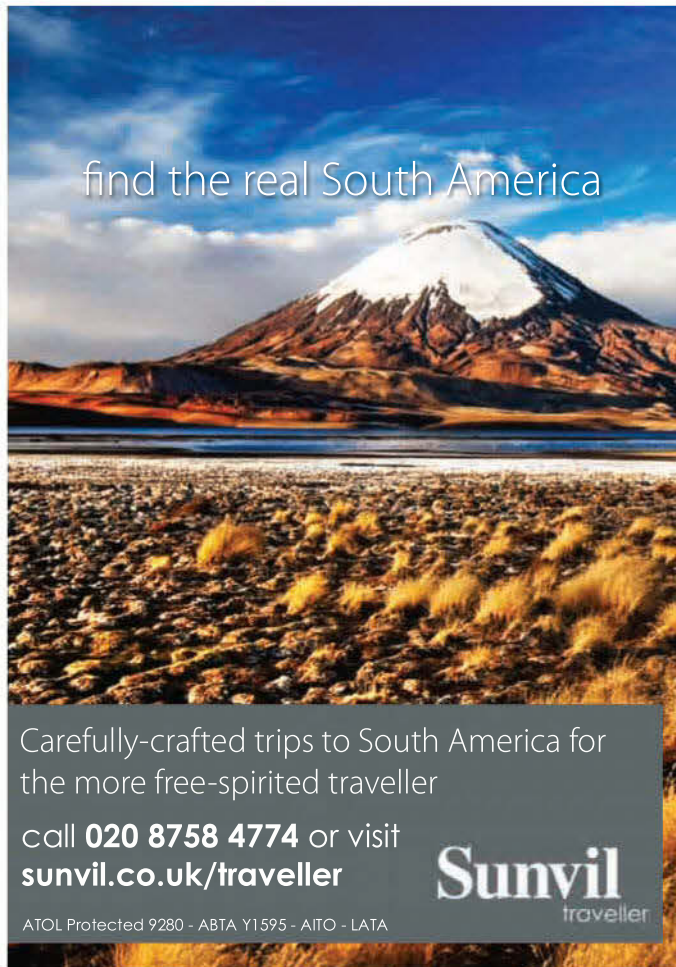
The overland trip into Guyana passes via Boa Vista and then involves a long, unpaved road journey up to Georgetown. It pays to break the journey at the Atta Rainforest Lodge, a jungle retreat in the heart of the 3,710 sq km Iwokrama wilderness reserve to see butterflies, monkeys, agoutis and lots of birds including the cock of the rock. Georgetown, a former plantation

settlement, is a very Caribbean city with lots of wooden houses, the old Bourda Cricket Club ground and the bustling Stabroek market, where the Demerara River flows under the holey floorboards.

The coast road leads across lots of rivers all the way to Suriname, the former Dutch colony. Paramaribo, the capital, is approached by roads lined with churches raised on stilts to prevent any flood damage, modern factories and Chinese supermarkets, swastika-bearing Hindu temples and mosques topped by crescent moons. There's a real cosmopolitan flavour here, and the capital has some of the best-preserved colonial buildings in all South America.

The final leg of the trip – now in EU territory – passes via the atmospheric ruined penitentiary Devil's Island and the Guiana Space Centre before arriving in Cayenne, the capital of French Guiana; a fascinating museum, excellent French-influenced cuisine and a handful of historic sites make this a curious, but comfortable conclusion to a memorable road trip. ►





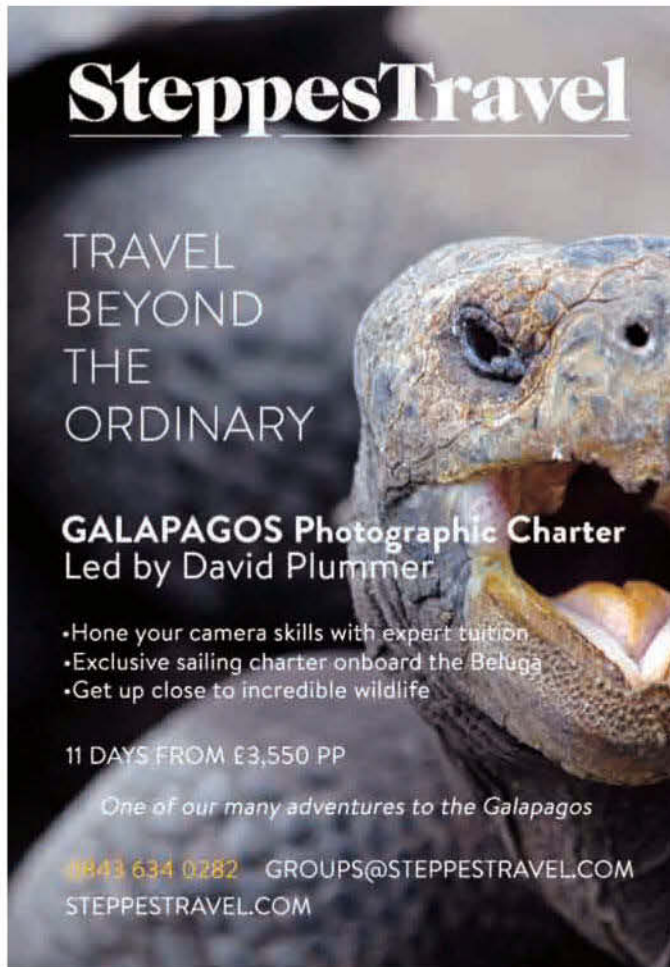
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## ◀ PAMPAS & PLAYAS URUGUAY

**DURATION: 7 DAYS** **BEST FOR:** Beaches, horseriding, ranches, gastronomy

**ROUTE:** Carmelo • Colonia • Montevideo • Cabo Polonia • Inland

**WHY DO IT?** With as much claim on tango and gaucho culture as its big southern neighbour, and with a proud African heritage that links it with its even bigger northern one, Uruguay is an underrated, traveller-friendly country. Its Atlantic beach resorts have already generated dozens of features in the fashion magazines, but

beyond posing Punta del Este there are many other attractions.

**T**his itinerary starts at Carmelo, on the east bank of the River Plate. A wine-growing area easily reachable by ferry from Buenos Aires, it's a natural departure point for a trip along the river via Colonia – Uruguay's best-preserved old town and a UNESCO World Heritage site – and the charming capital, Montevideo.

Take a good look around the historic centre and do a long walk around the coast if you need to stretch your legs, but make time for the atmospheric old wrought-iron Mercado del Puerto (Port Market), which is full of bars and restaurants, with local *candombe* musicians performing as they walk through with their drums.

A good highway takes you to Punta

del Este, by way of the part-Moorish, part Gaudí-esque Casapueblo, a remarkable house-turned-hotel that seems to tumble down the cliff. Punta itself has good beaches, but the scenes at La Barra and, further along, José Ignacio, are far hipper. Some of South America's best restaurants are to be found here.

Up the coast, the towns of La Paloma, La Pedrera and bosky Cabo Polonia are less pretentious than the resort areas, and there's excellent camping at the latter.

Wrap up with a trip inland via gaucho country to sleepy Garzon, where there is a beautiful five-room hotel and a fine restaurant – also called Garzon – run by Argentine chef Francis Mallmann. Saddle up a criollo horse after siesta and explore the pampas, looking out for rheas and other birds as you ride. ▶







**Into the unknown**  
Travel in Paraguay is rough edged but truly wild – hire a 4WD

**TOP TIP**  
Binoculars are essential – while Africa wins on mammals, South America's birdlife is the best in the world. Take a field guide too.

## ◀ GRAN CHACO & THE 'OTHER' PANTANAL **PARAGUAY**

**DURATION: 16 DAYS** **BEST FOR: Wildlife, birdlife, 4WD exploring**

**ROUTE:** Asunción • Villa Ygatimí • Laguna Capitan • Fuerte Olimpo

**WHY DO IT?** Landlocked and lacking many of the photogenic landscapes – and just about all the luxuries – offered by its neighbours, Paraguay is South America's rough-edged reject. Its draws are its strange history – from quasi-feudal oligarchy to neo-fascism; its diverse ethnic groups (including the Guarani


natives and the Mennonites); and its genuine wildness. The main challenge is getting around, and a 4WD vehicle and private driver-guide are highly recommended if you want to do this 2,500km round-trip inside two weeks.

**A**sunción is more like a backwater town than a capital city, but it has some elegant civic buildings and good museums.

It's just over four hours on a decent road to Villa Ygatimí and the 700 sq km Mbaracayú Biosphere Reserve. Run by the Fundación Moisés Bertoni, this model reserve is listed by the WWF as one of the planet's 100 most important sites for biodiversity. Comprising Atlantic Forest and *cerrado* (savannah), it's home to more than 400 bird species (including the endangered black-fronted piping-guan) and many mammals. There is also a resident Aché indigenous tribe, who are allowed to hunt using traditional methods.

From here, the road heads west into the hot, dry, sparsely populated lowlands of

the Gran Chaco. The lakelands north of Filadelfia are known for their abundant birdlife. Migratory birds, including flamingos, can be seen in large numbers at Laguna Capitan, one of the more accessible lakes, and at Laguna General Díaz, one of the largest. Horseriding can be arranged on estancias in the Chaco.

The riverside town of Fuerte Olimpo is the gateway to the Pantanal, the largest wetlands in the world, shared by Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay. Motorboats ferry visitors out into the channels to see caiman, capybara, storks and herons, and to fish for piranhas. With careful planning, it's possible to meet indigenous groups, such as the Chamacocos-Ishir, and to visit the Mennonite colony of Filadelfia. 



### More online

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Bogotá is the ideal place to start. Spend half a day in historical La Candelaria, marvelling at the neighbourhood's colonial buildings. To peer deeper into Colombia's rich history, the Catedral Primada de Colombia and the Capilla del Sagrario both house centuries of religious architecture, textiles and artwork.

Carved stonework and tall columns adorn the Capitol neighbourhood, while the Museo del Oro – an exhibition of 32,000 pieces of gold – is one of the most important in the world.

### WILDLIFE WANDERS

Away from bustling Bogotá, take an Avianca flight to Santa Marta on the northern coast. From there it's an easy journey to the remarkable Tayrona National Natural Park. Walk through the park's dense jungle, the last place on the planet where you can spot the cotton-top tamarin, while also ticking off the mantled howler monkey and oncilla cat, before reaching the coastal viewpoint, the Sea of the Seven Waves. Hop on a boat tour of the Bay of Gayraca, before sailing around the cove on to the white beaches of Playa Cristal.

After swimming the crystal-clear coral reefs, hop west to the city of Cartagena de Indias, where you could stay at one of **EVOCA's** historic boutique hotels ([www.evocahotels.com](http://www.evocahotels.com)). For a panoramic view of the whole city, scale the Monasterio and Iglesia de La Popa, a 500-year-old, 140 metre-tall church and monastery famous for resembling the stern of a galleon. Explore the city further by taking a visit to the San Felipe de Barajas Castle atop San Lázaro hill and also the Bovedas, a collection of archways built into the city wall.

With its diverse landscapes and contrasting cities, Colombia will amaze you with wild surprises around every corner, trail, archway and alleyway...



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HighLives Travel, Avianca and ProColombia are offering you and a friend the chance to win a week's trip to Colombia for two, including flights, accommodation and tours of Bogotá, Tayrona National Natural Park and Cartagena de Indias, where you'll stay in one of **EVOCA's** boutique hotels. To enter, answer the following:

**Q: What percentage of the planet's birdlife can you see in Colombia?**

(a) 10% (b) 15% (c) 18%

To enter and for full terms & conditions, go to [wanderlust.co.uk](http://wanderlust.co.uk)/competitions or send your answer to the *Wanderlust* office (address p2). The closing date is 5th August. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or sponsors.



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# Wanderlust

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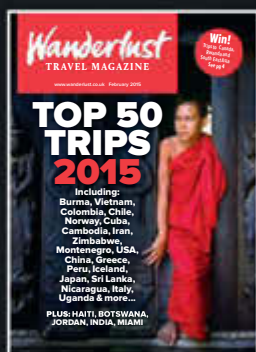
**13 WILD FRONTIERS** India, Siberia, Canada, Greenland, Iran

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A bear and wolf  
watching hotspot?  
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Greece





A close-up, low-angle shot of a brown bear walking through a forest. The bear's thick, shaggy brown fur is the central focus, with its legs and paws visible as it moves across a ground covered in fallen autumn leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and brown. The background is a soft-focus forest with tall, thin tree trunks and more foliage, creating a sense of depth and a natural, somewhat mysterious atmosphere.

# Land of **GODS & MONSTERS**

Northern Greece is better known for the deities of Mt Olympus than as the home of bears and wolves. But go down to its woods today, and you might find a big surprise...

WORDS **SARAH BAXTER**





**T**akis sliced the giant porcini as if it were a ham; the mushroom – pig-like in size – had been plucked from the forest floor but five minutes earlier. I lent back against the limestone, in the shade of a holm oak, and took a bite: meaty, musty, nutty, delicious. Takis sliced more, adding the raw porcini to our spread of bread, sheep's cheese and roasted Florina peppers, slippery with olive oil. He poured me a tsipouro; I took a hot, throat-coating sip, then balanced the little glass amid the lichen. "It's better, more natural, than ouzo," Takis said. "Tsipouro is health!" He poured himself a second, then returned to the mushroom. It was 11am. It was quite a feast.

I suppose the only thing missing from this picnic were the teddy bears – though they were with us in spirit. We'd spent the past

few hours cycling and walking through their domain, and had seen plenty of evidence of their snacking: the rump-shaped depression in a cornfield; the paw-print by the lake (a favoured fishing spot); the pile of seedy scat. It seemed that here, in the Macedonia region of northern Greece, neither I nor the resident European brown bears were going hungry.

## Greek legends

Greece and bears. I'd never put the two together. In popular culture, Greece is a land of islands, not ursines. But, of course, there's far more to the country than beaches – including, in the lesser-visited northern mountains, an estimated 200 bears. This is not a wildlife population without problems. Habitat fragmentation, road construction, hunting and illegal capture all threaten the bears. But I had come to visit an organisation called Arcturos that works to improve the animals' plight – and which, happily enough, is located just outside one of Greece's prettiest villages.

In Greek legend, Arcturos is the bear-guardian. After Zeus had turned Callisto and her son/his love-child into the constellations of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, the god-king placed another star, Arcturos, nearby to watch over them. In Greek reality, Arcturos has the same role. The organisation was established in 1992 by Yiannis Boutaris – the straight-talking, unconventional mayor of Thessaloniki – after his son saw a dancing bear. Since then, Arcturos has successfully campaigned for a ban on such practices; in 2012, Greece became the first EU country to ban all animal performances.

If you happen to be an ex-dancing bear, there are worse places to see out your days than in the sanctuary at Nymfaio. The village is postcard. Neat stone houses and grander mansions cling to cobbled lanes, 1,350m up on the slopes of Mt Vitsi amid a fuzz of beech forest. For centuries this was a thriving trade hub of 3,500 people, but mid-20th-century urbanisation saw the village's population and fortunes tumble;





**Gorging on Greece**  
The wolf sanctuary is an easy cycle from Sklithro; Nymfaio perches 1,350m up Mt Vitsi; wild mushrooms abound



## ‘Neat stone houses and grander mansions cling to cobbled lanes, 1,350m up on the slopes of Mt Vitsi amid a fuzz of beech forest’

by 1980 it was virtually in ruins. However, designation as a ‘protected traditional settlement’, and a huge restoration project – spearheaded by Boutaris – has returned Nymfaio to its former glory, aesthetically at least: the population is at most 150, and trade is now largely in tourism, but it looks pretty as a picture.

### Care bears

The bears – currently 11 of them – live on the edge of the village in a 12.5-acre enclosure that aims to mimic their natural habitat. I walked down the forested drive to the sanctuary just before 9.30am, feeding

time, and found keeper George despairing at a section of splintered and scraped perimeter fence – last night a wild bear had tried to break *in*. Not an uncommon occurrence, he explained ruefully: “They smell the food.”

Talking of which, it was apples for breakfast, 12kg per bear. The animals, safe behind (intact) wire fences, each had a stall, fronted by heavy bars and a hinged trough. George poured the fruit into the holder, then swung it through to the bear with a clang, like a prison guard feeding a felon. I stooped to look closer, inches from the thick, paint-chipped metal –

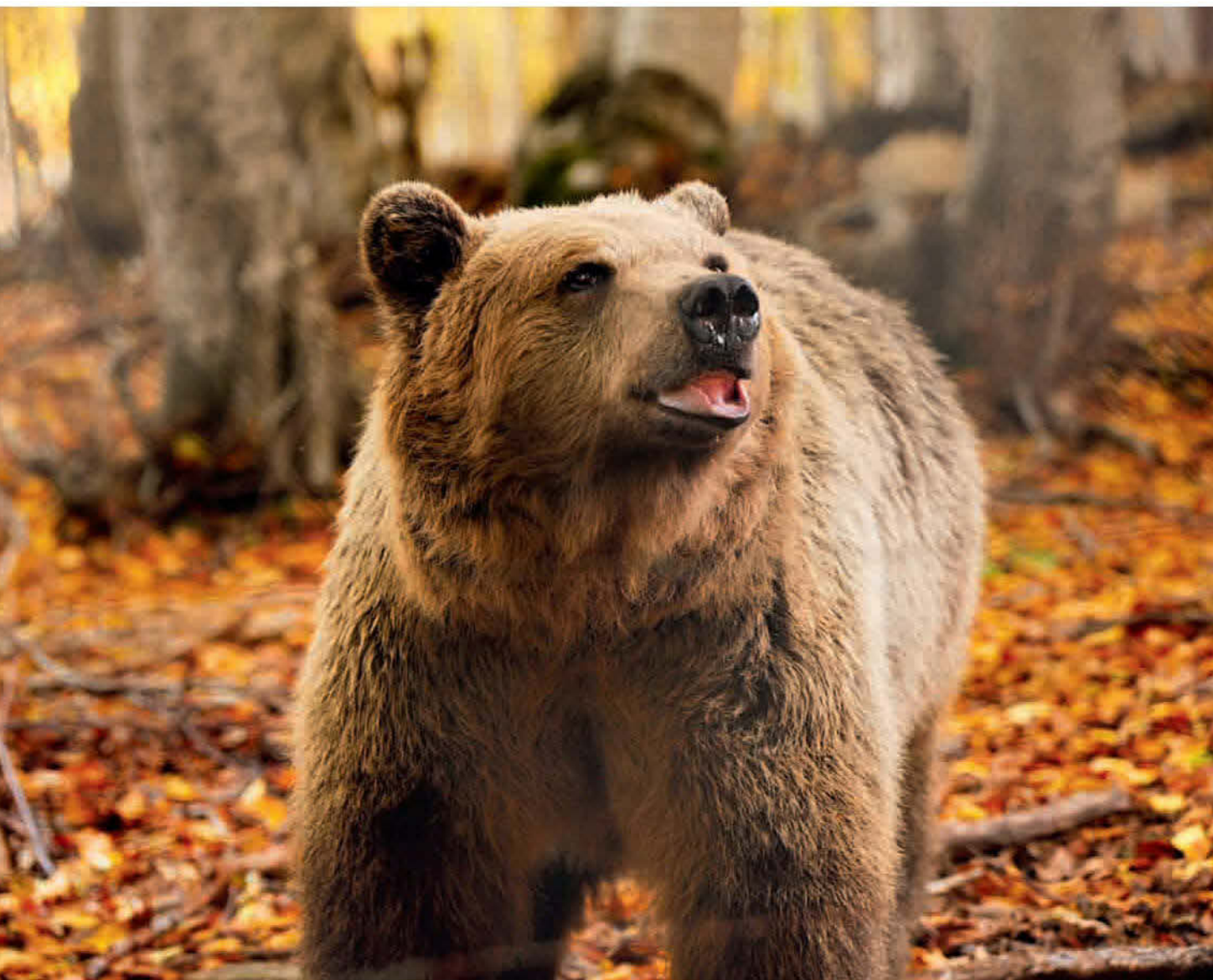
and inches from the muscular, strong-jawed bulk of hungry bear.

Different bears ate differently. Some chomped messily, in a splatter of juice and pulp; others plunged in snout-first as if bobbing at Halloween; others were daintier, skewering the fruit on their sharp claws as if eating lollipops. The air smelt of wet fur and cider.

Most of the bears at the sanctuary have been rescued from zoos or illegal ‘trainers’. “People stole cubs from caves, and broke their teeth and claws,” George explained as we gave Tassoula – taken in as an orphan in 1993 – her apples. “They would play an instrument while forcing the bear onto a fire, so it ‘danced’ on its hind legs; eventually this becomes learned behaviour.”

Arcturos doesn’t breed bears, and most of its residents won’t be reintroduced into the wild – they’ve spent too long in captivity. Instead, Arcturos aims to address illegal wildlife captivity, educate landowners and the public, and protect natural habitats. For instance, when a new segment of the Via ►





**‘The beech were blazing in the autumn sun as we walked alongside a stream. We veered uphill, bouncing on a soft mattress of leaf litter and mushrooms.’**

◀ Egnatia Highway – the old Roman road between what is now Albanian Durrës and Turkey – sliced Greece’s wild bear habitat in two, Arcturos campaigned for the erection of a reinforced fence and the creation of passages, to allow wildlife to cross.

### Into the woods

The E4 long-distance footpath from western Spain to southern Greece also passes through wild bear country, running right past Nymfaio. Alas, no time for that, but I managed a shorter walk from the village.

The beech were blazing in the autumn sun as we walked alongside a stream, keeping a lookout for freshwater crayfish. We passed a horseman leading his animals across a ford before we veered uphill, bouncing on a mattress of leaf litter and mushrooms. The fungi were everywhere: nausea green, rusty orange, pale blue; some resembled pleated corals, others sprigs of alfalfa; and there were Disney-ish fly agarics and puffballs that, when squeezed, exhaled like smokers.

Electra, the indefatigable wife of the local priest, had joined me, and was bravely

collecting different types – she was going to check their safety for consumption later, she said. I was glad she was being careful, as she’d kindly made my lunch, a golden leek-and-feta *pita* (pie). She also, she told me, makes her own line of traditional products from local ingredients: jams and relishes, and liqueurs made from blackcurrant, hazelnut and wild cherry. By the time we’d crossed a sweep of open grassland and crested the hill, I was salivating. I devoured my pie looking down on a patchwork valley to hazily fading peaks; on a clearer day, I’d have seen Mount Olympus.

### What big teeth you have...

We didn’t see any bears on our walk, but we did find a lump of seed-full scat, suggesting we were in the right vicinity. Neither did we find any wolves, the other alpha species roaming these mountains that Arcturos is trying to protect. ►



### Ursine action

Arcturos cares for 11 bears, who love eating apples. Walks in the nearby countryside reveal beech forest and bear pawprints, while the birds prefer Sklithro's church tower







◀ The next day I headed to the wolf sanctuary in nearby Agrapidia with Takis and his son Nikos, who hire out bikes and lead tours of the area. We met in the village of Sklithro, close to the church; the belltower, crop-topped with nests, resounded with crows and a strangled congregation as we cycled past, down the road, onto a farm track and into the fields. Almost immediately Takis spotted fresh bear tracks leading across the muddy furrows. “See how they have bigger back paws, smaller front,” he explained. “There’s a den up on the hillside – the bear comes down to eat the corn.” It’s an easy meal.

The locals harvesting potatoes in the field opposite seemed to have it harder, bent-backed under the sunshine, sifting through the spuds. They had a cracking spot for their labours though, deep in a green valley amid the Vitsi Mountains. A tree-lined stream tinkled nearby; otters live in the waterway, Takis told me – well, if they haven’t been killed by the mink, which animal-rights activists released from a fur farm nearby.

Takis was a postman by trade but a forager by passion. As we pedalled, then strolled, through the herb-scented countryside, he pointed out its bounty: wild saffron, lemon

**‘He padded out into the open; so handsome, so cute! Until he bared his teeth and snarled – caged perhaps, but immutably wild’**

thyme, wild pear and walnut trees, St John’s wort, oregano and downy-leafed verbascum – also known as ‘cowboy toilet paper’. And then, of course, the mushrooms: not just our delicious porcini but many others, from the edible, schnitzel-like *macrolepiota* to types that can be dried to make healing powders.

Before long we arrived at the wolf sanctuary, where our walk’s fragrant peacefulness was disrupted by howls and yelps – not from the wolves, but the resident Greek shepherd dogs. While the sanctuary cares for eight orphaned or formerly captive wolves, its main focus is promoting this traditional dog breed in an attempt to reduce human-wolf conflict and safeguard the country’s 700-800 wolves.

Christos, who works at the sanctuary, showed me around, from the visitor centre to the edge of the large, woody enclosure.

“I will be a lawyer to defend wolves,” he told me, scanning for his favourite animal, Lyk. “Why do they kill five or ten sheep at a time? We have store cupboards, wolves do the same. If I walk in the wilds, and I’m hungry, and I find an empty supermarket, I don’t just take one biscuit.”

Farmers will kill wolves that decimate their flocks. Arcturos is trying to solve this problem by encouraging the farmers to employ Greek shepherd dogs, an ancient species talked of by Aristotle and Plato. “It thinks like a wolf,” said Christos. “Wolves can trick other dogs. But not a Greek shepherd dog – it never leaves its flock.” Arcturos supplies these superior defenders to farmers for free, keeping 12 animals for breeding. There is a long waiting list.

We walked along the sanctuary fence for a while, peering in hopefully. Finally I saw





**Fruit of the earth**  
Alpha's vines are monitored by satellite, while the Vitsi Valley's potatoes are more traditionally farmed



on site. "It's very low yield," said Kostas, "but produces the best dry Greek red."

From the old to the uber-new, Kostas explained some of the gadgets Alpha uses: "We can monitor wine by satellite – a vine's heat profile tells us when grapes are ready." And then there was the WineScan machine, which can carry out 150 micro-corrections a day during fermentation, to ensure the viticulturist gets his desired blend. "Of course, the machine doesn't have a nose or a mouth," said Kostas as we stared at pages of WineScan conclusions. "You still need someone to taste it." That sounded more like it.

In an immodest room, heavy with accolades and framed certificates, 14 different Alpha wines and a little spittoon sat waiting. Challenge accepted.

Gulping the gamut from reds via roses and whites to dessert wines, my mouth wrestled with wintry black fruits, strawberries and roses, pineapple and mangoes, quince and honey. The winner, in my book, was the Alpha Xinomavro 2010 Reserve, with its savoury undertones of olives and tomatoes. It would have been just perfect, in fact, for a picnic under an oak tree, with a large, fresh porcini and the company of bears and wolves. 🐾

something move amid the foliage. Lyk, a young male given to Arcturos by a farmer who'd kept him as a pet (until Lyk attacked one of his sheep), was feeling curious. He padded out into the open; so handsome, so cute! Until he bared his teeth and snarled – caged perhaps, but immutably wild.

## Grape expectations

Christos had told me that, as well as sheep, wolves love to eat grapes – they're full of vitamins and clean the blood, apparently. Well, I'd drink to that, preferably a nice xinomavro at the Alpha Wine Estate in Amyndeon, the smallest, coldest, driest appellation in Greece.

Small, perhaps, but not insignificant. Alpha's founders picked this location – a prehistoric lakebed, surrounded by mountains – for its singular geomorphology

and climate. They cultivated and experimented for ten years before actually producing their first bottle, and continue to use the latest technology to create award-winning wines.

When I arrived at the very large, very pink winery, all was quiet. "We've been harvesting for five weeks and just finished an hour ago," explained Konstantinos Arvanitakis, Alpha's export manager, before taking me on a tour around the estate. They don't get bears here. "Tortoises and hedgehogs nest on the vineyard," Kostas told me, "and we've found two pieces of mammoth."

Neat leafy lines stretched across the plains, to the point where the land fell away to the valley below. Alpha grows nine varieties of grape in all, including 'sour black' xinomavro and white malagouzia; most are recently planted, though there is a 100-year-old vine



# 8 GREEK WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

Bears and wolves aren't the only surprising species lurking in Greece – the country's national parks offer a range of wildlife experiences. Here are eight of the best...



## 1 SEA TURTLE

**WHERE?** Zakynthos National Marine Park, Zakynthos island

◆ Zakynthos is home to one of the most important nesting habitats in Europe for the loggerhead sea turtle. The turtles are most commonly found in the Bay of Laganas and the Strofadia Islands, 65km south of Zakynthos. As protection of the turtles is top priority for the marine park, travellers are asked not to disturb the nesting beaches – visiting after dark is not permitted. Catch sight of the turtles in the water either via a boat trip or diving tour; just be sure to book with a responsible company.

**WHEN TO SPOT THEM?** April-July, turtle nesting season.

**OTHER WILDLIFE?** Mediterranean monk seal, kingfishers, frogs, iguana and porcupine.



## 2 WATER BUFFALO

**WHERE?** Lake Kerkini, north Greece (90mins from Thessaloniki)

◆ Not every European lake can boast a population of wallowing water buffalo. The lake and fiercely protected surrounding wetlands are home to hundreds of these hairy, horned beasts, which munch on the lush meadows and bath in the waterholes. It's a Serengeti-esque sight, best enjoyed on a boat trip across the mirror-like lake.

**WHEN TO SPOT THEM?** March-May or September-November – the long, dry days are perfect for a boat trip.

**OTHER WILDLIFE?** Keep an eye out for the birdlife: over 300 protected species nest and breed here, including dalmatian pelican and eagle owl.



## 3 CRETAN IBEX

**WHERE?** Samaria Gorge National Park, western Crete

◆ With their pointy ears and long goat-like beards, kri-kris (Cretan ibex) are one of Greece's most characterful critters. Spot them scuttling over the rocky trails of the gorge, snaffling shrubs and low trees. The kri-kri is probably the rarest species of ibex in Europe, found only in this mountainous national park, and it is carefully protected. Spotting one from a herb-scented hiking path is a treat – chances are it'll size you up with a boggly-eyed stare before diving off into the undergrowth.

**WHEN TO SPOT THEM?** May-June and September-October, to avoid the crowds.

**OTHER WILDLIFE?** Bearded vulture and rare Cretan wildcat.



## 4 BIRDS

**WHERE?** Prespes National Park, north Greece

◆ Merging into national parks in neighbouring Macedonia and Albania to form a transboundary reserve, Greece's Prespes National Park is home to hundreds of species of flora and fauna. The Greek section covers parts of lakes Megali Prespa and Mikri Prespa, where more than 200 species of aquatic birds have been spotted, in particular colonies of white and red pelicans. The roads that circle the lakes make for a scenic drive – bring binoculars.

**WHEN TO SPOT THEM?** March-May, to be in with a chance of spotting rare water birds.

**OTHER WILDLIFE?** Colonies of white and red pelican are frequently spotted; also water buffalo and otter.





## 5 BUTTERFLIES

**WHERE?** Valley of the Butterflies, northern Rhodes

♦ In late May every year, the island of Rhodes welcomes thousands of butterflies, which congregate in the treetops of this aptly-named valley in quivering, colourful clouds. They are attracted by the valley's high humidity and the tempting scent of the *zitia* (sweet gum) trees. This is a beautiful spot even without the flutterers, with its leafy shade and burbling streams. And if you stay quiet and still, the butterflies might even land on you.

**WHEN TO SPOT THEM?** The butterflies arrive in late May and stay until September to shelter from the cool.

**OTHER WILDLIFE?** Caterpillars, moths and more butterflies!



## 6 MONK SEAL

**WHERE?** Alonissos Marine Park, Sporades islands

♦ As Greece's first marine park and the largest marine protected area in Europe, Alonissos is a must for anyone keen to discover the country's – and the continent's – sea life. The reserve's most famous resident is the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*), one of the world's largest species of seal, growing up to 2.5m long. It is classed as critically endangered, with around 250-300 thought to live in Greek waters.

**WHEN TO SPOT THEM?** Year round.

**OTHER WILDLIFE?** Take a boat trip around the islands to spot dolphin species: bottlenose, short-beaked, Risso's and striped.



## 7 OTTER

**WHERE?** Nestos Delta, north Greece (30mins from Xanthi)

♦ The Nestos River Delta, a mix of sand dunes, lagoons and salt marshes running into the Aegean Sea, supports the country's largest population of otters. The mineral-rich earth has nurtured a thriving array of plants and trees, which form the perfect habitat for some of the country's rarest mammals, including wild boar and even the occasional wolf. Stroll amid the juniper bushes and towering oak trees for a walking safari unlike any other in Europe.

**WHEN TO SPOT THEM?** Year round.

**OTHER WILDLIFE?** Look out for wild boar, wolf, wild cat, flamingo, yellow jackal and a range of birds of prey.



## 8 FLAMINGO

**WHERE?** Lake Kerkini, north Greece (90mins from Thessaloniki)

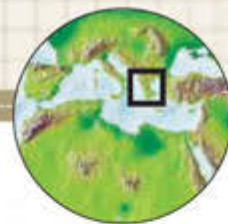
♦ As well as water buffalo, Lake Kerkini is a great spot for greater flamingo. Head for the small port of Mandraki, the place to observe these graceful birds in the winter months – you might even see a 1,000-strong flock take flight – as well as gaggles of ducks, pelicans and waders. Simply, there's lots going on: thousands of waterfowl overwinter here.

**WHEN TO SPOT THEM?**

Birdwatching is good here year round, for different species; April is perhaps busiest, with an influx of migrating birds.

**OTHER WILDLIFE?** As well as all those birds, look for water buffalo, otter, red fox, wildcat, European polecat and beech marten. 📸





# Greece Footnotes

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Capital:** Athens  
**Population:** 10.8 million  
**Language:** Greek  
**Time:** GMT+3 (Mar-Oct GMT+2)  
**International dialling code:** +30  
**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals  
**Money:** Euro (€), currently around €1.4 to the UK£. ATMs available in towns and cities.

### When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Winter** – chilly, especially in the north. Snow possible in the hills. The bear sanctuary is closed during the hibernation season (January-mid March).  
 ■ **Shoulder season** – Best months to visit. Spring flowers and autumn colours splash the northern mountains.  
 ■ **High summer** – very hot, though cooler on the northern highlands.

✚ **Health & safety**  
 No specific vaccinations needed. Wear sun screen and a hat. Take a valid EHIC; organise comprehensive travel insurance ([wanderlustinsurance.co.uk](http://wanderlustinsurance.co.uk)).

📖 **Further reading & information**  
**Greece** (Rough Guides, 2015)  
**Greece** (Lonely Planet, 2014)  
**Antidotes to Technology: Nymfeon Forest Paths**, by Penny Turner, is a charming walking guide produced by Arcturos, and available locally [visitgreece.gr](http://visitgreece.gr)



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- ◆ **Short Break Thessaloniki** – issue 153
- ◆ **Greek flavour: The seven dishes you have to try** – online exclusive

#### PLANNING GUIDES

- ◆ **Greece travel guide**

## THE TRIP

✈ **Getting there**  
**British Airways** (0844 493 0787, [ba.com](http://ba.com)) flies from London Gatwick to Thessaloniki. Returns cost from around £81 one-way; journey time is about 3.5 hours.

Budget flight options are also available: **EasyJet** ([easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)) flies to Thessaloniki from Manchester (seasonal) and Gatwick; Meanwhile, **Ryanair** ([ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com)) flies out from Stansted.

🚌 **Getting around**  
 Nymfaio is 180km north-west of Thessaloniki. **Buses** run from Thessaloniki to Ptolemaida, about 35km from Nymfaio; however, a **hire car** is the best way to explore the region.

£ **Cost of travel**  
 Northern Greece is **generally good value**. A *koulouri* (pretzel) costs 60¢ from a street stand; a main dish in a good restaurant costs from €8.50. A bottle of award-winning wine, direct from the vineyard, costs €11-15. Buses are cheap.

🛏 **Accommodation**  
**City Hotel** ([cityhotel.gr](http://cityhotel.gr)) is a good, central option in Thessaloniki, with contemporary, stylish rooms. Doubles from €70 (£55).  
**La Moara** (Nymfaio; [yadeshotels.gr/hotel/la-moara](http://yadeshotels.gr/hotel/la-moara); [lamoara.gr](http://lamoara.gr) – in Greek) is a romantic hideaway set in a former manor house, with glorious grounds and views. It has eight rooms decked out in traditional furniture. Full of charm. Doubles from £65.

🍴 **Food & drink**  
 As you'd expect, you can eat very well in northern Greece. Local Macedonian produce includes wild mushrooms, wild boar, Florina peppers and *grivadi* (lake fish).

Look out for *trahanas*, granules of buttermilk pasta that look like fat cous-cous; *ajvar*, a roasted pepper and paprika relish; *sout makalo*, meatballs in a 'porridge' made from flour and chicken broth; *pita*, a pastry pie, often containing cheese; and *pasta flora*, a lattice jam tart.

To drink, there are excellent wines. Finish with a tot of *tsipouro* (grape-pomace brandy).

To try high-quality regional dishes, head to **Kontosoros** ([xino.nero.gr](http://xino.nero.gr)), which puts a modern spin on Macedonian classics, and family-run **Taverna Thomas** (Sklithro, near Amynteo; [tavernathomas.gr](http://tavernathomas.gr) – in Greek).

## NORTHERN GREECE HIGHLIGHTS



1 **Thessaloniki**  
 Greece's second city is a waterside tumble of churches and cool cafes, with a strong foodie scene and lively, studenty atmosphere (*pictured*).

2 **Arcturos Sanctuary**  
 This sanctuary for rescued bears is on the edge of Nymfaio; visit the animals (best at feeding time) and the visitor centre. The ticket price also includes entry to the wolf sanctuary in nearby Agrapidia (€6; [arcturos.gr](http://arcturos.gr)).

3 **Nymfaio**  
 Allegedly one of the ten most picturesque villages in Europe, nestled

1,350m up Mt Vitsi – cobbled streets, traditional architecture, fine views ([nymfaio.gr](http://nymfaio.gr)).

4 **Wine**  
 Macedonia produces some great wines; the high-tech Alpha Estate (Amyndeon; [alpha-estate.com](http://alpha-estate.com)) offers free guided tours and tastings.

5 **Mushroom walks**  
 Father and son Takis and Nikos Voglidis hire bikes and run tours, including marvellous mushroom walks, from Sklithro ([artemisoe.gr](http://artemisoe.gr) – in Greek; email [info@artemisoe.gr](mailto:info@artemisoe.gr) for info).





# TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

Become an instant expert  
with our travel know-how

Create  
the perfect  
Singapore  
Sling  
see p63



■ **This month's experts include:** Language lover Benny Lewis, p60 ♦

Wild thing finder Dave Hamilton, p64 ♦ Icon snapper Francesco Carovillano, p66 ♦

Health hero Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p68 ♦ Luggage lady Phoebe Smith, p71 ♦



**Lingo lessons**  
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speaker to practise  
with will speed up  
your learning



■ The *Wanderlust* Masterclass

# How to learn a language quickly

**L**earning a language can help unlock new adventures. “When you learn other languages, you open up an entirely new culture and every single person from that culture,” says Benny Lewis, author of *Fluent in 3 Months*. But so few of us take the trouble to try. Think it’s too hard? Convinced you don’t have the time? Read on...

## How hard is it?

While it’s not the easiest thing in the world for everyone, learning a language doesn’t have to be that difficult – the key thing is

that you *want* to do it. “I think the biggest problem is finding the time and keeping motivated,” says Sarah Cole from online resource Teach Yourself Languages. “You don’t always see results fast, so people often just give up.”

Preparation is key. Lay out a plan before you start learning, setting both short-term and long-term goals. However, make sure your plan isn’t too daunting so you’re not put off, advises Lisa Frumkes, from language learning software publisher Rosetta Stone.

Once you’ve decided what your aims are, it’s all about finding the right language-learning method for you.

## Ways to learn a language

There are many ways to study a new language. You can self-teach yourself – perhaps investing in interactive online learning courses or via audio CDs that you can listen to wherever you like. You can hire a teacher for one-to-one tuition or join a class to benefit from common learning. Or you could try a combination.

It’s useful to discover what type of learner you are. Are you a visual learner, someone who might improve by watching films? Are you more of an audio learner? Or do you benefit from reading a good old-fashioned textbook?



## 'In all language learning, it's important to remember that this is fun and not a critical survival skill'

Benny reckons that one of the most effective ways is to befriend someone whose mother tongue is the language you're aiming to learn. "Set yourself up with a language-exchange person or teacher online and talk to a native. Your skills will improve through genuine use of the language."

Benny and Sarah both recommend iTalki (italki.com), a Skype-style online service via which you can have video calls with both locals and teachers for immediate feedback.

### Utilise 'wasted time'

Many of us think we don't have time to learn a language, but there are always hidden pockets you can utilise. "Keep your learning materials handy," says Lisa. "Then, when you have odd bits of time available – waiting in a queue, for the bus, for a meeting to start – you can steal a few minutes to study. Even five minutes could be beneficial."

Lisa adds that regular chunks of learning are ideal: "Consistent, preferably daily, effort is key." Little and often every day is much more effective than large blocks of learning once or twice a week.

### Make it fun

The important thing to remember is to have fun. "Learning a language is hard work, but it needn't be drudgery," says Lisa. Include light-hearted ways of learning. If you enjoy watching films, choose the odd movie in your target language and turn off the subtitles. Or tune in to a foreign radio station. Even if you don't understand much of what is being said, you'll be getting used to the sounds and flow of the language.

Language teacher Kerstin Hammes (fluentlanguage.co.uk) agrees: "It's important to remember that learning a language is suppose to be fun and not a critical survival skill."

Don't heap too much pressure on yourself – set realistic targets, says Benny. For example, try to learn the words for objects in your kitchen one day, before choosing a different room or theme the next. If you're feeling confident, try to form your own basic

sentences by the end of the first week, even if they're grammatically incorrect.

### Don't be afraid to make mistakes

There is no shame in mispronouncing a word or not quite understanding a response. It's all part of the learning process. "The more mistakes you make, the more practice you get, and the faster you will improve," says Benny. "Don't wait until you're 'ready', because that feeling will never come. We always have more to learn."

One way to overcome this fear is to start speaking the language from day one. Don't be afraid to try it out on a short trip or on any visiting tourists.

"I think people worry too much about their accent or wait to speak until they think they'll be perfect," adds Sarah. We're not even perfect at our own language. How often do we say the wrong word or use incorrect English?

### Practice makes perfect

To really improve and learn a language quickly, it comes down to practice. Be disciplined. When you feel at the end of your tether or a bit fed up, remember why you're learning the language in

the first place, whether that's to turn that trip of a lifetime into an unforgettable one, or to give you the chance to strike up friendships with locals. "Language is what defines us as human.

It's what characterises cultures," says Sarah.

Just as with life, with language you will never stop learning new words or new phrases. Keep practising; when you feel you've learned as much as you can, try to use the language as often as possible, so you don't lose all that hard work!

Next time you're abroad, a local could be so impressed by your efforts they might point you in the direction of somewhere good for food or even a secret place.

So decide on your method, set some targets and get started. Make learning a language your next adventure.

#### Case study

### KATY GOUGH

An expat explains how she went from fearing a French *faux pas* to ordering crossaints by the Seine



#### Why did you decide to learn a language?

Learning to speak another language has always been on my

bucket list, so I grabbed the opportunity to live in France. Arriving here with sketchy memories of GCSE French meant I was plunged in at the deep end with a lot of work to be done.

#### Why do you think languages are perceived to be so hard to learn?

Anything that requires dedication – such as going to the gym or learning to play a musical instrument – is always difficult at the beginning. You have to put in the time to get the results. It would be fantastic if you could become bilingual overnight but sadly there is no quick fix. You'd also miss out on the fun/frustrating journey to becoming fluent in a language.

#### What different methods did you find most useful when you were learning French?

At the beginning I would sit with a dictionary and an *Asterix* comic, working through every page. Yes, it took me five hours, but that sense of pride when I understood what I was reading was a real boost! Films, podcasts, language apps and online radio stations also helped. That way I learned much more 'real' French.

#### How did you fit learning a language into your busy schedule?

I've never had a formal French lesson; I just tried to use my brain as a little sponge, soaking up everything going on around me – the radio and television are always on in the background.

#### What are your top tips for learning a language?

Overcome your fear of making mistakes. They will happen but you will learn from them. I was so terrified of making any *faux pas* I kept my mouth shut for too long but now I just go for it. Even if the sentence isn't perfectly formed, at least I'm trying! 🇫🇷

### TOP TIP

Talk to yourself. You might feel a little mad, but saying words out loud will help you get used to making the right sounds, and will help keep the vocab you've learned fresh in your mind.



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**No pressure**  
Aviator Wiley Post  
broke flight  
records and  
designed suits

### FACT

Wiley Post lost one of his eyes in an oil field accident in 1926. He used the money he got from the settlement to buy his first aircraft.

■ Instant Expert

# Wiley Post

## Er, who?

Wiley Post was an American pilot during the 'Golden Age of Aviation' (between the First and Second World Wars). In 1933 he became the first person to fly solo around the world when he piloted his plane, *Winnie Mae*, from New York City and back in seven days, 18 hours, stopping off several times along the way.

## OK. Anything else he was famous for?

Yes. His solo flight around the world was not his first record-setting flight. Two years previously, he and navigator Harold Gatty became the first to fly around the world in a fixed-wing aircraft, completing the feat in eight days, 15 hours.

His passion for high-altitude flying led him to help develop one of the first pressure suits; he also discovered the jet stream! All quite remarkable for a man who had dropped out of school early, and who in 1921 was sentenced to ten years in jail for carjacking – he ended up serving 14 months before being paroled.

## Wow. Did any of his flights go wrong?

Unfortunately so: 15 August marks the 80th anniversary of his death, aged just 36. In 1935, entertainer and pal Will Rogers convinced Wiley to fly him through Alaska in search for inspiration for his newspaper column. A few miles from their destination, Point Barrow, they stopped at a lagoon to ask for directions. On take-off, the engine failed and they plunged into the lagoon; both were killed instantly.

## How can I mark the anniversary?

Head to Oklahoma – the home of both men. Post is buried in the Memorial Park Cemetery in Edmond, while the Will Rogers Birthplace Ranch can be found in Oologah. At the latter, on the 80th anniversary of the duo's deaths, over 100 small aircraft will fly onto the ranch's airstrip.

If you can't make the trip just now, indulge in some armchair travel instead: read *Around the World in Eight Days*, a ghost-written account of Gatty and Post's world record flight.

## ■ 5-step guide to...

### CREATING THE PERFECT SINGAPORE SLING

**1 Preparation is all**  
The key to creating an original Singapore Sling – first created in 1915 at the Long Bar in Raffles Singapore by bartender Ngiam Tong Boon – is to ensure that all ingredients and equipment are prepared before you start mixing the cocktail.

**2 Use the right measures**  
Pour the ingredients into a cocktail shaker, using a jigger to ensure accurate amounts: gin (30ml), cherry brandy (15ml), Cointreau (7.5ml), DOM Bénédictine (7.5ml), Angostura bitters (dash), grenadine (10ml), pineapple juice (120ml) and lime juice (15ml).

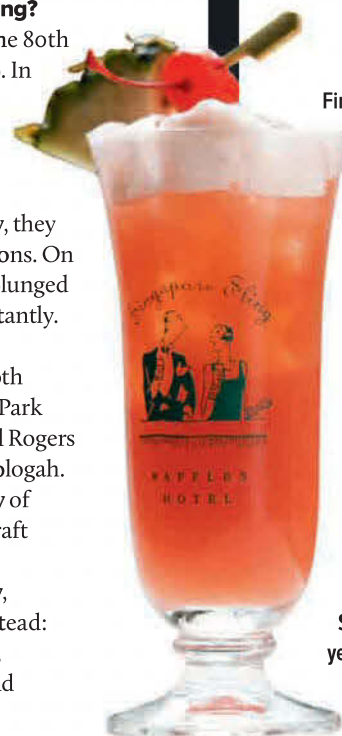
**3 Shake it up**  
Add cubes of ice to the mixture and shake the cocktail shaker vigorously for about ten to 12 seconds.

**4 Strain it well**  
Fill a proper Sling glass with ice and use a bar strainer to strain the shaken cocktail straight in.

## 5 Garnish and serve

Finish the cocktail with the traditional garnish – a slice of pineapple and a cherry. Pop in a straw. Your Singapore Sling is now ready to be enjoyed! 🍹

Tips provided by **Aron Manzanillo**, Head Bartender at Raffles Singapore. Raffles Singapore is celebrating the 100th anniversary of Singapore Sling this year – for more info, go to [www.affles.com/singapore](http://www.affles.com/singapore)





# ASK THE EXPERTS

Hiking California; frost bite in the Arctic; protecting your photos; motivating travel-reluctant other halves; exploring ancient Britain – our experts put you in the know...

## THE EXPERTS



**ALAN CASTLE**  
Author, *Trekking the John Muir Trail*  
(Cicerone Press)



**DR JANE WILSON-HOWARTH**  
*Wanderlust's health guru*  
(wilson-howarth.com)



**DAVE HAMILTON**  
Author, *Wild Ruins: The Explorer's Guide to Britain's Lost Castles, Follies, Relics and Remains*  
(WildThingsPublishing.com)



**CAROL E WYER**  
Author of *Grumpies on Board*  
(Safkhet Publishing)

**Q** I'm reasonably fit but have never done a long, backcountry hike before – can I manage California's John Muir Trail?

**Steve Jane, by email**

**A** Walking a backcountry trail such as the JMT successfully and enjoyably is all about planning. Start your preparation at least six months prior to setting out, and read up on the trail and wilderness trekking in general. You will need to apply for a trekking permit well in advance; you will also need to buy and package your food for the trip and arrange for it to be sent on down the trail for later collection.

If you have never backpacked before, make a short (say three/four day) trek at least a couple of months before the JMT, to get used to carrying a heavy backpack and to iron out any problems with your gear.

The actual trail itself is not particularly difficult. It is relatively easy to follow, being well marked. There are a few steep ascents and descents that require care, but no scrambling. Nevertheless, there is over 14,000m of total ascent in its 370km, and 11 high passes of 3,000m-plus over which to haul a heavy backpack. The trail reaches 4,420m on Mount Whitney, so problems of altitude will also have to be considered. There are several river crossings to negotiate, the difficulty and danger level of which will depend on the state of the river at the time of your crossing; you will also need to be bear aware.

It takes a lot of organisation and effort to walk the JMT, but your reward will be a truly wonderful hiking experience through one of the world's most beautiful and unspoilt wildernesses. Enjoy!

**Alan Castle, author of *Trekking the John Muir Trail* (Cicerone)**

**Q** I'm going on an Arctic trip. I have fairly poor circulation – how can I guard against frostbite?

**W Baxter, by email**

**A** It sounds obvious but dress properly. If your core is warm the rest of you will be at lower risk. Drinking alcohol will increase your risk.

Winter in the Arctic is dark so pack important things like extra gloves and socks in places where they can easily be found in the dark and with numb fingers. Mitts are better than gloves. Consider wearing inner silk gloves under your mitts. Remove your socks when crossing rivers and change them if they get wet.

I'm uncertain how easily you'll recognise the early signs in Arctic half-light but frostnip usually starts in the ears, nose, cheeks, fingers, toes or chin, making the part numb and white. If chilling continues the tissues suffer superficial, then deep, frostbite with the potential for serious loss of tissue death. Unfortunately deep frostbite isn't painful, until rewarming starts. Read up the signs!

**Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, Wanderlust's health guru**



**Q** What can I do if my camera's memory card corrupts?

**Martin Fox, by email**

**A** Don't format your card. Take it out and set it aside until you can get back to your computer. Every time something gets written back to your card, you lessen the chances of getting all your photos back.

Use a card reader. It could have been your camera that created the problem, and using it to connect to your computer to access your card could further exacerbate things. You'll get better results taking your memory card out of your camera and attaching it to your computer using a card reader instead.

Next, make a clone of your card – that way you have something to revert back to if things go wrong. There are specific programs that



**Wish they could all be Californian**

The John Muir Trail is walkable – providing you're well organised

■ Insiders' Guide to...

## ARGENTINA



**Adam Roberts**, product manager at Exodus Travels ([exodus.co.uk](http://exodus.co.uk)), explains why Argentina is his top South American destination

**WHY ARGENTINA:** An immense natural beauty with a blend of indigenous and colonial cultural heritage make it a dream travel location. You'll find enough regional diversity to last a lifetime of exploration and receive a genuine warm welcome from the area's vivacious and proud inhabitants.

**MUST SEE:** Patagonia is a very special place and it is hard not to feel overwhelmed by the otherworldly landscapes and array of colours from the moment you arrive. The Salta and Jujuy provinces are arguably even more spectacular. Here you'll find jungles, salt flats and colossal gorges lined with multi-coloured rock formations.

**MUST DO:** Trek in the Fitz Roy region of Los Glaciares National Park, March/April being a good time. The Andes lake crossing from Bariloche to Puerto Varas is an iconic and unique journey (and features on our new cycling tour!). Take a road trip on Ruta 40 – the northern sections in particular make for spectacular driving.

**FOOD & DRINK?** Condiment fans will be pleased to discover *chimichurri* – the perfect tasty accompaniment for a grilled steak (*bife de chorizo*) but what's to stop you putting it on absolutely everything? Share in a delicious and sociable pastime by sampling the ubiquitous *yerba mate* hot drink (and develop a lifelong habit!)



**'It takes a lot of organisation and effort to walk the John Muir Trail, but your reward will be a truly wonderful hiking experience'**

will do this for you. Make sure you find software that works for the make and model of your camera and memory card.

Reconsider your format. If you shoot in RAW files you save more info but dice with the chance of them becoming corrupted. Consider shooting in JPG instead – this is easily changed on your settings.

**Wanderlust team**

**Q** My partner is quite a reluctant traveller. How I can persuade him to join me?

**Vanessa G, by email**

**A** Use interests or hobbies that you share as a catalyst and theme your trip around them. Should sports cars hold an appeal, head to Florence to soak up the culture but also arrange for you both to drive a Ferrari around the streets, or travel Route 66 in the USA in a classic car.

If he's an airplane enthusiast, how about persuading him with a night in the converted cockpit of a jumbo jet at Stockholm Airport? Music lovers could make for one of the many festivals worldwide, beer fans to Belgium, while for those who love football, why not try

Brazil where you can watch free matches? Nature-lovers might like Macedonia, home of thousands of butterflies. Have a go at flamenco dancing in Argentina. It is really a case of capturing his imagination. **Carol E Wyer, author of Grumpies on Board (Safkhet Publishing)**

**Q** I'm trying to get the family interested in British history. We've done Stonehenge – where can we find other ancient ruins/standing stones?

**Brian Barker, by email**

**A** Great question, well where do I start? If you want more of an insight into Stone Age and Neolithic ways of life then I would recommend a visit to some of Britain's ancient villages. The best of these are at opposite ends of the country:

Carn Euny and Chysauster in Cornwall and Skara Brae on Orkney. The remains of the dwellings in these villages are so remarkably intact you can see precisely where our ancestors would have slept, ate and cooked their food.

For a bloodier side to our nation's history then the ruined border castles of Scotland and Wales are worth a visit. These are fantastic places to explore and help illustrate the wars of independence. For less well-known ruins you could try the overgrown abandoned churches of East Anglia – some of these of which have remained in ruins since outbreaks of plague in the Middle Ages!

**Dave Hamilton, author of Wild Ruins: The Explorer's Guide to Britain's Lost Castles, Follies, Relics and Remains (WildThingsPublishing.com)**



# TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS



Photographer  
**Francesco  
Carovillano**

offers his top tips on shooting (over) familiar icons in fresh ways

**W**hen visiting iconic cities, it's easy to be overwhelmed by familiarity and thus struggle to find a fresh photographic perspective. What often helps me out of this creative cul-de-sac is translating the environment into simple compositional elements such as lines and shapes.

This photo from Paris is an example of that approach: I wanted to show the Eiffel Tower in harmony with other Parisian landmarks. While crossing the Alexander III Bridge my interest was captured by the huge statue and I chose this point of view to display the Eiffel Tower and the Seine too. I filled the foreground with the sculpture, embracing the environment; this helps grab the viewer's attention. In the background, the Eiffel Tower breaks the horizon – a thick line in the centre of the composition.

Finally, I waited for a *bateau-mouche* river boat to pass by, to add a little flavour of the bustling city life going on around these landmarks. 📷



Francesco Carovillano's book, *Paris & the Seine* (ViewFinder, £7.50) is available on the iBookstore and Amazon. [www.viewfinderbook.com](http://www.viewfinderbook.com)

## 1 Choose your angle

Find the most creative point of view, and then select the best lens to capture it. Here, I wanted to create a greater sense of depth so I placed the camera slightly higher than the statue to show more of the river. I then got in close with a 24mm wide-angle lens, which helped me to emphasise the size of the statue and fill the foreground with it, giving the image its impact.

## 2 Use filters

A common problem faced by travel photographers is that the sky is usually brighter than the foreground, especially at sunrise or sunset – and even more so if you're shooting so closely to the subject. Consider using a graduated neutral density filter (GND), which lets you expose for the foreground while darkening the sky. In this example I slid a 0.6 GND in front of my lens to expose the statue without losing any of the detail in the sky.





### 3 Get focused

Your focal point will automatically tend to the middle of the frame. In a vast scene like this, to try get everything in focus, I manually set my focal point – in this case it's on the head of the statue.

### 4 Be appy

Light is essential when shooting outdoors. To help plan your shoot, use an app that calculates where the sun and moon will rise and set. You can then work out which position to shoot from, depending on whether you want the sun in the picture or directly illuminating the scene from behind the camera.

### TOP TIP

Picture the shot in your mind first. It's more satisfying to return home with one shot that corresponds to your vision rather than taking lots of images and hoping to find a gem among them.

### 5 Get stable

Tripods are a must when taking photos in low-light – they help you create sharp images when using slow shutter speeds. They can also help you refine your composition. You can find tripods for any device nowadays, including DSLRs, tablets and smartphones.







# TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



## Health Guide: South America

This vast and varied continent seems to teem with nasty bugs and scary wildernesses – but what really are the biggest health risks? **Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth** investigates

**L**atin America is huge and diverse – and seemingly full of health hazards. Take heart though – your biggest risks will be road accidents and (especially in the warmer parts) a short-lived upset stomach. However, it pays to be prepared, so here are some of the hazards that travellers to South America face.

### Montezuma's revenge

The tropical parts of Central and South America have high hit rates for travellers' diarrhoea. The worst countries in the New World are Mexico and Peru.

Along with the 'simple' kind of gastroenteritis that burns itself out in 36-48 hours, there are nastier pathogens that spread in the same way – unhygienic food production. These diseases include typhoid and paratyphoid (capsules now protect against both), and bacillary and amoebic dysentery. In Bolivia, for

example, fields may be fertilised with 'night soil' (human faeces) that effectively recycles parasites.

It's worth adhering to the 'peel it, boil it, cook it or forget it' rule. Raw fish – including *ceviche* – has been blamed for outbreaks of profuse watery diarrhoea but fish that's well marinated in lemon is least risky.

To avoid tapeworms and worm cysts in the brain, order your steak and pork well-cooked.

### Piranhas & candiru

Piranhas and candiru fish are infamous among travellers to South America. Although piranha feeding-frenzies do happen, they are unlikely unless they've become trapped in a tiny body of water that is drying out.

Candiru are pencil-lead thin and parasitise other fish; on very rare occasions they try to enter the urethra of male humans taking a swim. Where these fish are common and small boys swim with them, local women are good at winking them out.

Stingrays inhabit the rivers too so watch where you wade.

### Chagas disease

This infection may have been the death of Darwin but is more commonly spoken of than experienced. It's transmitted in the rainforests by assassin bugs, which hurt when they bite. Sleep in a hammock with attached mosquito netting.

### Scorpions & spiders

Bark scorpions are particularly dangerous but there is an antivenom so fatalities should be rare and partially depend on getting to a competent clinical facility promptly. There are over 1,000 deaths from scorpion stings in Mexico annually; those who die are mostly local children.

Widows, browns and sac spiders should be treated with respect – if they bite, there is usually an area of skin and subcutaneous tissue death.



### Ticks

American ticks come with special health warnings – potentially they can give you one of nine dangerous infections, and American Lyme disease seems to be more malign than the European variant. Keep ticks off. If you find one feeding on you, remove it as soon as possible (pack a tick-removal tool) and flood the wound with pisco or some other strong spirit alcohol.

### Leishmania

Tiny biting sandflies can squeeze through mosquito nets





**A sting in the tail**  
Bark scorpions are responsible for 1,000 deaths each year

and spread an illness that starts as a painless ulcer-like skin-lesion. This looks as if it should be itchy or painful but isn't. It grows and may disappear spontaneously after a month or so.

Depending on the form of leishmania, up to half of victims will go on to have a nasty parasitic infection that requires extended hospital treatment. Prompt diagnosis allows a simpler, more effective cure. Odd 'sores' can also turn out to be skin cancers, so show any weird lumps and bumps to a doctor. Keeping covered, wearing repellent and sleeping under an insecticide-impregnated net will protect you.

**'Bark scorpions are particularly dangerous – despite the availability of an antivenom, there are 1,000 fatalities every year'**

## Malaria

Malaria is a problem in much of the northern part of South and Central America – read up on your destination. Although the most dangerous forms aren't present, malaria pills are recommended for many rural destinations. Malaria is only one of many insect-borne diseases on offer in South America so take precautions to avoid bites at all times.

## Yellow fever

Yellow fever is a disease that simmers in forest animals and breaks out unpredictably. During outbreaks in South America the authorities sometimes react by instigating mass vaccination, including stopping busses and immunising everyone on board – you'll need to wave a yellow fever certificate to

avoid being stabbed along with everyone else.

Consult the web (eg, [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)) to check the current status of your destination. There have been some deaths reported in Brazil (in May 2015) due to yellow fever and there have been nine cases in Peru in the first three months of 2015.

## Chikungunya & dengue

Chikungunya now seems to be a big problem in South and Central America and the Caribbean. It's spread by mosquitoes and causes a disease akin to 'breakbone' fever or dengue, which is also a problem locally. Wear repellent at all times.

## Snakes

Snakebite is a significant problem in South America but the scale of the problem is hard to gauge. People most at risk are agricultural workers clearing vegetation. Antivenom may be available at some clinics.

## Vampires

The Americas are home to real vampires: bats that bite mammals, instil anticoagulant and lap the blood; a significant proportion carry rabies. Anyone sleeping out should consider this risk; arranging pre-trip rabies immunisation would be wise.

Evidence is growing that a full course of rabies vaccine with a booster gives lifelong immunity. Dogs are less of a rabies risk than in the Old World, but even so there was a rabies death in Chile in 2013 following dog bites. 🐾

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth has updated *Your Child Abroad*, now available as a downloadable PDF or Kindle. *Wanderlust* readers can get a 35% discount: visit [www.bradtguides.com/your-childabroad-ebook.html](http://www.bradtguides.com/your-childabroad-ebook.html) and enter the code 'WANDERLUST' at checkout.





Photo: Mandy Tee

Ladies' Ventura  
Fleece: £135

Ladies' Ventura  
Windproof: £90

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**Mandy Tee, MIA Outdoor instructor, climbing & mountaineering**

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■ Traveller's Guide To...

# HAND LUGGAGE

A carry-on bag has to do many things: tote tickets, double as a day-sack, head out on walks, survive cities *and* meet airline regulations. Try these out for size...

## VERSATILITY

Think about your bag's main use. If you plan to do a lot of walking, look for a bag with cushioned, mesh-lined straps, a good back system and hipbelt. If you're more likely to use the bag as a city or laptop pack, look for padded sleeves and security features. If you'll be carrying cameras and lenses, choose a bag that will hold them safely.

## CARRYING METHODS

Some packs have rucksack straps, others have grab handles or shoulder straps, some offer a combination of all three. One carrying method might be sufficient if you're only using the bag on the plane; if you plan to use the bag for city touring and walks, you might want more options.

## WEIGHT

Lighter is generally better for your back but less weight might also mean the bag has fewer comfort-focused features (eg good rucksack back system, padded hipbelt, choice of carrying method). Also, if the bag is heavy when empty, this may effect what else you can pack if your airline has a hand-luggage weight restriction.

## COMFORT

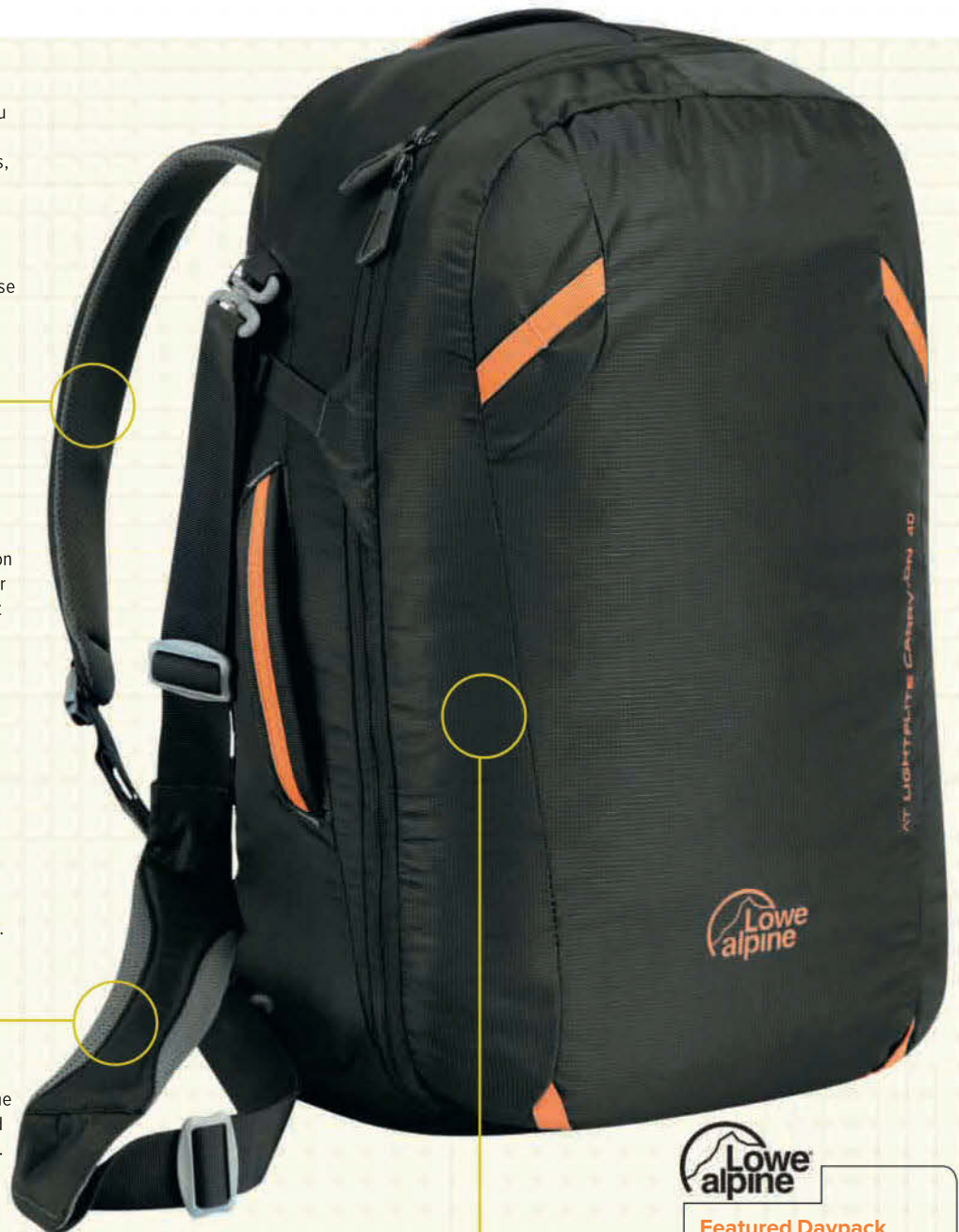
Look for good cushioning in the areas that will be used most. If the bag has a zip-away rucksack system, ensure the bag is comfortable when being carried as a rucksack and by its other handles.

## SIZE

Many bags claim to comply with IATA guidelines on allowable cabin baggage size. However, these guidelines are not mandatory and many airlines have their own (smaller) dimension rules. Do some research before buying.

## EASE OF USE

Hand luggage should be user-friendly. Is the main compartment easy to pack? Can you access the pockets quickly? Are the alternative carrying methods easy to use? Do you need all those extra functions or are they just extraneous bells and whistles, taking up weight and space?



### Featured Daypack

The bag pictured is the **Lowe Alpine AT Lightflite Carry-on** (£65), lightweight, made from durable Trishield fabric, with three carry options it's ideal for travellers. For stockists and more products visit [www.lowealpine.com](http://www.lowealpine.com)



# Hand luggage

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...



Dimensions: 55 x 19 x 32cm

## CRAGHOPPERS Worldwide 45L £45

**THE TEST:** If you fancy a rucksack but are worried about the straps getting in the way sometimes, try this. Rucksack straps, a hipbelt (cushioned, mesh-lined, two zip pockets) and an airflow back system can be zipped away to leave a streamlined pack. There's a grab handle so you can haul it onto shelves easily; it would benefit from a shoulder strap though.

On the outside are two wand pockets (ideal for tripods or waterbottles), a front zip pocket (large enough for documents, pens etc) and bungee cords. The zipped main bag space has two access points – top and bottom – with drawstring fabric between them, so you can transform it into two compartments. It also has a hydration bladder pouch (which could also take an iPad), a zipped security pocket (big enough for a passport) and a rollaway raincover. At 1.25kg it's fourth heaviest here.

**The verdict:** A great choice for walkers – though they may not feel the need to hide the straps away in the first place.

### IN BRIEF

Features ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Versatility ★★★★★

Value ★★★★★

Comfort ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

[www.craghoppers.com](http://www.craghoppers.com)



55 x 20 x 35cm

## LOWE ALPINE AT Lightflite Carry-on £65

**THE TEST:** First thing: bags in this new travel range from Lowe come with a list of the airlines that accept each model (packed to capacity) as hand luggage. Handy.

At 90g, this is the lightest pack here. It has stashaway cushioned, mesh-lined rucksack straps, which – unlike the Craghoppers pack – tuck away into pockets, saving weight on zips and fabric panels. There's no fancy back system or hipbelt but this carry method is only meant for short-term use. There are also grab handles and a clip-on shoulder strap.

At the top is a zip stash pocket with a key clip. There's one wand pocket on the side and a luggage tag and compression straps so you can make it smaller. A large tamperproof zip enables you to open up the whole inside for easy packing. There are zipped mesh pockets and elasticised straps to hold items down.

**The verdict:** Great value, super lightweight, versatile and easy to pack, though not the most comfy on the back.

### IN BRIEF

Features ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Versatility ★★★★★

Value ★★★★★

Comfort ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

[www.lowealpine.com](http://www.lowealpine.com)



53 x 23 x 33cm

## OSPREY Farpoint 40 £80

**THE TEST:** For an extra £15 you get a similar style bag to Lowe with a slightly more refined rucksack function. This also unzips fully so you can pack it like a suitcase; it also offers two grab handles and a shoulder strap. But there is a proper back system, which is mesh covered for ventilation, making walking more comfortable. This all zips away, which adds weight – at 1.2kg it's third-lightest on test.

Inside the good-size main compartment there are clippable elasticated straps for securing items and zipped mesh panels (good for dirty washing). On the outside there are front wand pockets that will take a waterbottle, a zipped compartment including a key clip (good for tickets, money etc) and compression straps. It also offers two padded sleeves suitable for tablets and laptops (at the same time) and a zip pocket for accessories.

**The verdict:** Versatile, well-featured and good for those carrying laptops or tablets – all for a reasonable weight and good price.

### IN BRIEF

Features ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Versatility ★★★★★

Value ★★★★★

Comfort ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

[www.ospreyeurope.com](http://www.ospreyeurope.com)





## How we did the test...

We asked gear manufacturers to submit bags suitable to be carried as hand luggage on planes. These needed to be versatile enough to use while travelling, offering a number of carrying options. From those we were sent our editor, Phoebe Smith, took them out on the road to see which performed best. The six here are all 'Wanderlust Approved', with a Value Buy and Best Buy being indicated.



56 x 24 x 36cm

### EAGLE CREEK Gear Hauler £130

**THE TEST:** This pack is similar to the Osprey but slightly lighter (1.15kg; second-lightest on test). It has a large main compartment – though no elasticated straps to hold items down – and a padded compartment for tablets/laptops. It has grab handles and a shoulder strap; there are also hideaway rucksack straps that zip into a front pocket – a nifty design, though having the bag's front against your back isn't the most comfortable.

There are compression straps and a self-repair main zip. The front pocket has compartments tailored for phones and pens, a zipped pouch for headphones and a security pocket for a passport/tickets. On one end there's a generous zipped pocket that's perfect for dirty/wet clothes or a pair of shoes – though this takes up some space in the main compartment when it's packed.

**The verdict:** Some nice features, a good weight and the ability to safely carry a laptop or tablet, but the price tag may be a turn off.

#### IN BRIEF

Features ★★★★★  
Design ★★★★★  
Versatility ★★★★★  
Value ★★★★★  
Comfort ★★★★★  
Overall ★★★★★  
[www.rohan.co.uk](http://www.rohan.co.uk)



56 x 23 x 35.5cm

### PACSAFE Venturesafe 45L £190

**THE TEST:** Yes, pricey – but this is no ordinary bag, it hides a gamut of security features. It has a built-in slash-proof mesh, and all zips are puncture resistant and interlock for extra security. Above the main zips is a 'roobar' – an anchor point on which to hook and lock your zips; it can also be attached to the stainless steel locking cable (for securing to a pole/table), which is covered by fabric so it doesn't scream 'I'm valuable!'. All this adds weight: at 2.4kg, this is the heaviest on test by far.

It's also a good pack. It has compression straps, two wand pockets, a suitcase-like opening for easy packing, internal luggage straps, mesh-zipped panels and lots of space. The back panel unzips to reveal a rucksack back system (best on test): adjustable and ventilated, with a cushioned and mesh-lined hipbelt and straps. This does add more weight though, and takes up room inside.

**The verdict:** Heavy and pricey but if you're worried about security it's worth the weight.

#### IN BRIEF

Features ★★★★★  
Design ★★★★★  
Versatility ★★★★★  
Value ★★★★★  
Comfort ★★★★★  
Overall ★★★★★  
[www.pacsafe.com](http://www.pacsafe.com)



58.4 x 29.2 x 35.6cm

### F-STOP Tilopa £250

**THE TEST:** This hardy pack combines the safe carrying of camera equipment with a comfy design, suitable for walkers. Built to take an Internal Camera Unit (section dividers for camera lenses; the ICU for this bag is £50), it also has a padded sleeve for a laptop/tablet. An internal aluminium frame helps spread the load, so at 1.9kg, this is second-heaviest here.

There are clips for extra attachments – even skis can be mounted. Zips are heavy duty; some are coated to keep water out. There are side compression straps and a hydration pocket. At the bottom there's space for wet gear and a raincover, plus a stash pocket. Top lid pockets have specific space for camera memory cards, spare batteries etc, and the hipbelt and back system offer good ventilation and cushioning. Access is through the back panel where there are more pockets. There's a decent amount of room inside too.

**The verdict:** A hefty pricetag, but excellent for photographers who do multi-day walking.

#### IN BRIEF

Features ★★★★★  
Design ★★★★★  
Versatility ★★★★★  
Value ★★★★★  
Comfort ★★★★★  
Overall ★★★★★  
[www.paramo.co.uk/fstop](http://www.paramo.co.uk/fstop)



Thailand to Burma

A photograph of a train crossing a bridge over a river. The train has several colorful cars, including blue, red, and green. The bridge is made of dark wood and is surrounded by dense green trees and foliage. The river is calm, reflecting the train and the surrounding landscape. The background shows a steep, rocky hillside with more trees.

# ON THE TRAIN TO MANDALAY

A new border crossing, an old, notorious trainline, modernising worlds, ancient scenes – the rail and road ride from Bangkok into Burma is a journey through time

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **ALEX ROBINSON**





**Just the ticket**  
A train runs on the  
prisoner-built Wampo  
viaduct above the River  
Kwai, Thailand



W

ith shirts wet against our backs we reached the brow of the hill. I could finally see the view. And it was magnificent.

The vast sweep of the Salween River delta stretched at our feet towards the setting sun – red as a blood orange and leaking colour into the horizon. Crimson light shimmered off myriad streams, silhouetting stands of

coconut palms and a distant boat ploughing a tiny, glittering wake.

Mawlamyine city was off to our left, its towering pagodas brilliant as glowing embers in the dying light. Low mist rose from the scrubby forest below and sound drifted up towards us – the distant tinkle of prayer bells swaying in the gentle breeze, a yell from fishermen casting their nets, the chatter of a passing parakeets.

‘Mist on the rice fields, the sun droppin’ slow, the tinkly temple-bells...’ Kipling’s poem was ‘long ago an’ fur away’ – but I understood his Victorian soldier stuck in winter London, and longing to be in Mawlamyine, on the road to Mandalay.

### Railway respects

I’d set off on the road four days previously, beginning my journey a country away in Thailand amid the skyscrapers and rushing highways of 21st century Bangkok. I was nursing a hangover as I travelled to Thonburi railway station for the train to Kanchanaburi. The new border crossing into Burma lay there, at the start of the Kwai Death Railway built at the cost of thousands of Allied lives – immortalised in the 1957 movie *Bridge Over the River Kwai* and, more recently, in Richard Flanagan’s 2014 Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Long Road to the North*.

I’d been enthralled by the book and by dreams of Burma fostered by Kipling. I planned to follow the Death Railway’s route as far as I could, crossing David Lean’s famous bridge, entering Burma and connecting with the old British line that rattled on to Mandalay. Burma, people told me, is changing. Come before it’s too late, and take the train to see the real country.

As I drifted out of Thonburi, Bangkok’s skyscrapers faded through factories into suburbia. We sped up and a rushing highway streamed past, a newly built Buddhist temple and paddy fields farmed by tractors on huge spindly wheels. We began to climb into forest-covered hills and two hours later we slowed, slipped and shuddered into Kanchanaburi. ►







**Electric Thailand**  
A rail line cuts  
through the  
Sukhumvit and  
Silom areas of  
central Bangkok





### ‘The station was right next to the Bridge over the River Kwai. It was tiny – an undulation of steel arches on pillars over a sluggish brown stream’

◀ The station was right next to the Bridge over the River Kwai. It was tiny – an undulation of steel arches on pillars over a sluggish brown stream. Then I remembered that the film bridge was a fiction. The convicts had built two. This was the only survivor. The bridge was crowded with kids snapping selfies and coach parties of tourists, led by guides with placards.

After Flanagan’s book I needed something more sombre, and found it a short cab ride away at Kanchanaburi’s War Cemetery, where ranks of stone graves under a shroud of iron-grey cloud brought home the horror of the Death Railway. I found a namesake – an Australian AJ Robinson, who died here aged 34, a month after the end of the war. His grave was garlanded with fresh flowers.

### Welcome to Burma

Next stop: Burma. I caught the Death Railway to the infamous Hellfire Pass, where there’s a sobering museum and monument to the dead. The line stops here so I had to continue by road. In the half hour it took me to leave Thailand and meet with my guide, its surface had turned from teflon-smooth tarmac to rutted dirt.

On the map Thanbyuzayat – and the Burma section of the Death Railway – looked just a little further than Bangkok. I was peckish. Would we be there for lunch? My guide grinned. Chuckled. And then burst into a wicked laugh. “Are you mad!?” he asked in clipped, British English. “This isn’t Thailand. It will take us two days!”

“Welcome to Burma,” he added with a delicious hint of sarcasm, ignoring my Thai *wai* greeting, grasping my hand warmly and shaking it. “I’m Giovani.”

It’s not a common Burmese name, he told me as we bumped over the road, which dropped down a narrow river valley framed by steep jungly cliffs. He was named in honour of Italian missionaries who founded a school in his Karen village. Through them he found education and a way out of conflict with the military government.

“Burma is segregated into zones,” he told me. “We are passing through a brown zone – run not by the government but by Karen tribes. My village is remoter still – in a black area – a part of Burma the government don’t want visitors to see.”

“Burma not Myanmar?” I asked.

“Burma,” he said emphatically. “It’s what the lady calls it. The military call it Myanmar.” The lady, he told me, is Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Prize-winning opposition leader whose picture sat on the van’s dashboard.

We took lunch in a ramshackle roadside eatery – open-sided and roofed with palm thatch and plastic. I avoided the fragrant monkey curry and opted for chicken. Afterwards I lost myself in what would be the first of many astonishing views: a rushing mountain river cut a furrow through blue-green, rainforest-covered ridges; they stretched as far as I could see. A flock of white birds floated across one of the slopes – like falling confetti. ►





**Life on the Death line**  
(clockwise from this)  
A Buddhist zedi  
overlooks the undulating  
Salween River, Burma;  
a veteran of the wars  
between the Karen and  
the Burmese state  
proudly shows his gun;  
a public train; the  
Burmese end of the  
Death Railway in  
Thanbyuzayat; novice  
monks with bowls for  
alms at a Burmese station





# Myanmar

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*Nick - Founder*



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◀ Then my view was blocked – by a shirtless old man chewing betel nut and looking unsteady on his legs. He gave a big grin, shaped his hands into a camera and beckoned me to an open-sided bamboo shack a few metres away. Inside was a bed, a Buddha, a big clock and a radio. It was home.

He pointed to my camera. I should take a picture. But wait. He needed to dress for the occasion. After tugging a camouflage jacket from a nail hammered into one of the uprights and combing his hair, he slipped on a chunky gold watch, popped a cigar into his mouth. And pulled out a gun.

Before I could even flinch he was in photo pose, big grin, gun in the air. It wasn't a hold-up. It was a victory photo. I took the shot and showed the old man. He was delighted. These people have fought to keep their country. They want visitors to know.

## Stories of love and hate

A few hours later we were in Dawei, our first stop. We took dinner in a simple wooden restaurant next to a glorious sweep of pearly-white sand lapped by the gentle Andaman Sea. It seemed to stretch forever – empty but for a huddle of old wooden fishing boats. Tourists were still a curiosity. I attracted friendly stares.

And I attracted shouts over breakfast the next morning – from giggling kids on their way to school. Seeing me through the hotel window they called out, “Hello, whay you from?”

It took us the morning to reach Thanbyuzayat, where a rusting old locomotive stood on the Burmese end of the Death Railway and where I caught my first Burma train – climbing on a carriage that looked tawdry after Thailand, and in need of a clean. But the people were disarmingly friendly, families shared their food, maroon-robed monks welcomed me. And the view was magical. The flat landscape stretched across a plain humped with dome-

shaped hills. One looked like a giant sphinx, its 300m-high back bristling with stupas. I saw a huge concrete reclining Buddha sunlit on the side of another. “It's as long as a football field!” I said.

“It's longer,” replied Giovanni, “200m long – the largest reclining Buddha in the world.”

We reached Mawlamyine with sunset, the call to prayer from the town's twin mosques and the sight of hundreds of Buddhist monks wandering through the street. The next day we explored the city, driving past the crumbling mansions of ‘Little England’ – where Orwell had once been a colonial policeman, ‘hated by large numbers of people’. We walked the steps to the Kyaikthanlan temple, which Kipling had visited when Mawlamyine was Moulmein – the capital of British Burma. He'd been so smitten by a Burmese woman that he never made it to the pagodas immortalised in his love poem.

But we did, finding more magnificent views, hundreds of praying devotees and another love story connected with Mandalay. After the death of her husband King Mindon, Queen Sein Don had been exiled. Broken-hearted and hundreds of miles from her Mandalay home she shaved her head and became a Buddhist nun, using her inheritance to build a lavishly carved teak monastery next to the Kyaikthanlan temple. She filled it with treasures, including a replica of Mindon's Imperial Lion throne.

The monastery was empty when we visited – but for one young monk who'd made it his home. He sat on the floor in the wooden corridor, his belongings strewn around one corner of the throne room – blankets piled on a priceless antique gilt chair, a bag of washing soap slung on a teak table, a vest drying on an intricately carved screen. The Lion Throne sat opposite, an astonishing baroque filigree of swirling lotus fronds and sinuous gold dragons set against a screen of mirrors and ornate statuary. ►



**Taking it easy**  
A reclining Buddha in the Kyaikthanlan temple, Mawlamyine, introduced to the wider world by Kipling's poem 'Mandalay'





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**Making himself at home**  
The young monk outside the Lion Throne room in Queen Sein Don's teak palace, Mawlamyine

**‘The train was a moving market. Women hustled through, offering everything from barbecued sparrows to noodle salad – whipped up in a minute, mixed with cashew, chilli and raw onion and served on a banana leaf.’**

#### ◀ Always changing, always the same

The next morning I was back on the railroad to Mandalay. The decrepit old Chinese carriages crashed and swung over the buckled rails, which were the original British stock. Burma passed by outside: in dusty lanes where monks sat sidesaddle on mopeds; and in paddy fields dotted with farmers in conical hats and ox carts older than John Constable's 1821 *The Hay Wain* painting.

Station platforms were crowded with pink-robed nuns, families migrating with the entire contents of their houses and vendors clutching chickens. The train itself was a moving market. Women hustled through, offering everything from boiled eggs and barbecued sparrows to noodle salad – whipped up in a minute, mixed with cashew, chilli and raw onion and served on a banana leaf. It was utterly enthralling. For the first eight hours. But then the bumps and dusty heat began to wear. I arrived in Mandalay with the night, a splitting headache and a warm greeting from a new Burmese guide, Yan, who oozed efficiency and had me fed and checked-in to a hotel in no time at all.

I woke to a golden dawn, croissants and an air-conditioned car, which whisked us through Mandalay. We passed the walls of Mindon's old palace, the U-Bein teak bridge silhouetted against the early sun, and crossed the giant, snaking Irrawaddy.

By late morning we reached a low range of hills sitting under a dome of brilliant-blue sky. Yan led me down steps into a narrow gorge and smiled as he saw my jaw drop. Stretching before us was a terrace of Edwardian townhouses. One was topped with a very English town hall clock. It looked like Windsor. But it was more like Petra – these weren't buildings at all. They were the painted, carved facades of huge caves.

For two hours Yan led me through the caves of Hpo Win Daung, past facades topped with giant elephants to stone arches and Khmer-style filigree as ornate as a Fabergé ring. And as we walked through the hills we went back in time – from British Burma to the Burma of the great medieval kingdoms, whose life was depicted in astonishingly detailed brilliant-red murals.

And I realised I'd been travelling through Burmese history since I arrived – through tribal life and royal mansions, through Japanese and British occupation and into military dictatorship.

Come now, before Myanmar changes, travellers had told me. Before it loses its soul. But Myanmar has always changed. And always stayed the same. For in every one of hundreds of caves I'd seen – behind every changing facade, and in the soul of Burma itself – sat the Buddha. Timeless and serene. ■



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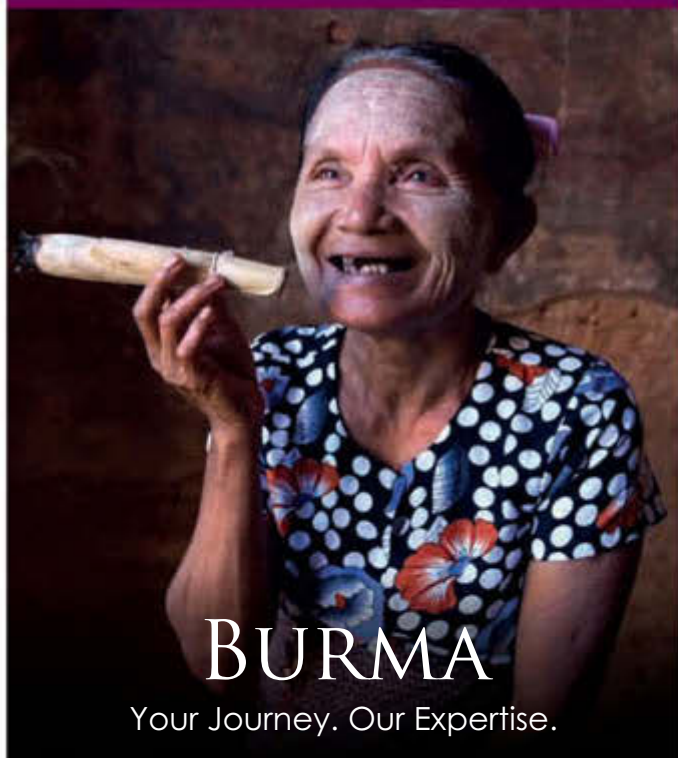
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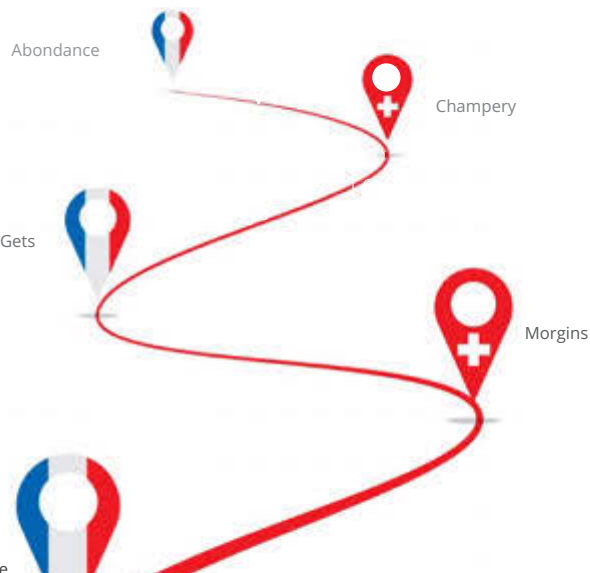
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# Thailand & Burma Footnotes

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Capital:** Bangkok (Thailand), Naypyidaw (Burma)  
**Population:** 67.7 million (T), 55.7 million (B)  
**Language:** Thai, Burmese, tribal languages  
**Time:** GMT+7 (T), GMT+6.5 (B)  
**International dialling code:** +66 (T), +95 (B)  
**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals for Thailand but required for Burma – apply well in advance at <http://evisa.moip.gov.mm>.  
**Money:** Thai baht (THB), around 48THB to the UK£. Burma kyat (MMK), around 1,600MMK to the UK£. There are ATMs throughout Thailand; credit cards are widely accepted. In Burma, there's an ATM in Mawlamyine and a few in Mandalay; larger hotels accept credit cards. Otherwise exchange US dollars (pristine bills only).

### When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Driest months:** Dec-Mar is sunniest and coolest, though temps still reach mid-30°Cs in Bangkok and Mawlamyine. Thai rainy season tails off mid-Oct. Nov sees few tourists and cheaper tickets.  
 ■ The Songkran water festival celebrations – prepare to be soaked.  
 ■ Humidity builds towards monsoon, which peaks May-early October.

### Health & safety

Diphtheria, hepatitis A, tetanus and typhoid jabs are recommended; take malaria prophylactics for Burma. There is on-going conflict in parts of Rakhine, Shan and Kachin states in Burma – avoid these areas.

### Further reading & information

**The Narrow Road to the Deep North** (Chatto & Windus, 2014) by Richard Flanagan is an account of the Death Railway  
**Burmese Days** (Penguin Classics, first published 1934) by George Orwell  
[tourismthailand.org](http://tourismthailand.org) Tourism Thailand

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- ◆ **Thailand travel guide**
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## THE TRIP

**Selective Asia** (01273 670001, [selectiveasia.com](http://selectiveasia.com)) offers an 18-day *Railways Old and New* trip to Thailand and Burma, with visits to Kanchanaburi, Dawei, Mawlamyine, Yangon and northern Burma from £2,653pp (based on two sharing), including B&B accommodation, internal flights, transfers and guides.

### Getting there

**Thai Airways** ([thaiairways.com](http://thaiairways.com)) flies London Heathrow-Bangkok from around £625 return. Flight time is 11.5 hrs. Mandalay-Bangkok flights cost from £65 one-way; flight time is two hours.

### Getting around

**The State Railway of Thailand** ([www.railway.co.th](http://www.railway.co.th)) has timetables in English. Arrivals overland from Kanchanaburi into Burma **require prior authorisation and tour operator booking** to secure a visa. While hotels and local operators can help organise trips and transfers in touristy areas such as Mandalay, booking trains in remoter areas is **best done in advance through a tour operator**.

### Cost of travel

In Thailand **you can get by on £20 a day**, sleeping in hostels and eating at markets; £35-50 a day will ensure better hotels and restaurants; £150 a day buys five-star treatment. **Burma is about two-thirds the price.** A bottle of beer costs about £1.50 in Thailand, £1.25 in Burma; a bottle of water is around 40p in Thailand, 20p in Burma.

### Accommodation

Thailand has a good choice in all categories, from plush boutique to boho backpacker. **Myanmar is more limited:** even expensive hotels can feel old-fashioned. Hostels exist only in the busy main centres – book ahead.

### Food & drink

India meets China in Thai cooking. Expect **ample chilli and spice** stirred into a wok full of fresh vegetables, ginger, lemon grass, kaffir lime leaves and galangal, garnished with *nam pla* (fish sauce). For something less familiar than green curry try spicy salads such as *som tam*, made with green papaya, glass noodles, prawns and lime juice.

**Burmese cooking is heavier**, thick with coconut oil and *ngapi* (shrimp paste). Most meals are a selection of dishes served in small bowls with accompanying sticky rice. *Mohinga* is the closest thing to a national dish – a fish noodle soup with onions, garlic, ginger, lemon grass and banana-stem hearts, usually served with boiled eggs, fish cakes and fritters.

## THAILAND/BURMA HIGHLIGHTS



### 1 Kanchanaburi

Home to the Bridge over the River Kwai, a haunting Second World War cemetery and the harrowing Hellfire Gorge where hundreds lost their lives.

### 2 Erawan Falls National Park

Waterfalls dropping through dozens of cascades in a forest-filled park.

### 3 Nakhon Pathom

This city has one of the world's tallest Buddhist stupas, towering over the flat plains a short ride from Bangkok (pictured).

### 4 Mawlamyine

Dreamy stupas, craggy hills, a vast river delta and the setting for poetry and prose by Kipling and Orwell.

### 5 Yangon

Burma's sultry main city is worth a stop for the shimmering Shwedagon pagoda,

which sits in a vast temple complex busy with Buddhist worship.

### 6 Mandalay

King Mindon's royal capital bristles with monuments – from crumbling teak bridges to lavish royal mansions and monasteries rebuilt after being fire-bombed by the Japanese.

### 7 Sagaing

Sweeping views of the magnificent Irrawaddy River from a string of stupa-crested hills.

### 8 Monywa

Bustling market town with few tourists but bags of character. The best base for a string of sights, including the Petra-like caves at Hpo Win Daung and Laykyun Sekkyia, the second-tallest Buddha in the world.







# WIN a £3,000 trip to Lake Geneva plus Mammut kit worth £545

Once the snow has melted, the Lake Geneva region is a walker's dream – enter our competition and you could be trekking there, in the best gear

**W**ith the Alps looming on the horizon, a giant lake glistening below, fairytale villages and a whiff of chocolate in the air, Switzerland's Lake Geneva region is the stuff of Christmas cards. But, though it's more famed for skiing, when the white stuff disappears, this is a perfect summer playground too.

The resorts of Villars-Gryon ([www.villars.ch](http://www.villars.ch)) and Les Diablerets ([www.diablerets.ch](http://www.diablerets.ch)) nestle in one of the Alps' most majestic enclaves – from here you get a breathtaking panorama that extends from Lake Geneva to Mont Blanc. This means it's paradise for outdoors types. Hiking and biking trails twist and turn in every groove of these alpine valleys, and fairytales and folklore swirl around the lakes. This is a place to stride out and explore.

Even better, this mountain haven is easy to get to. There are more than 20 flights a day from the

UK to Geneva, from where it's only 120km – by scenic, speedy and super-efficient train – to the resorts. Less than two hours after touch down, you can make a break for the hills.

## HIKERS' PARADISE

Set among swathes of pines and lush meadows, the two resorts of Villars-Gryon offer abundant hiking adventures, with 500km of trails. Head out to wander amid traditional wooden chalets and picturebook hamlets such as Ensex and Gryon. Or take advantage of the summer's melted snow to access high passes like the Col de la Croix and viewpoints like Roc d'Orsay for bird's eye views of the Alps.

You can even walk in a land of legendary beasts. While the Scots have the Loch Ness Monster, the Swiss have the White Dragon of Lake Chavannes – a creature that supposedly

protects the submerged treasures of Princess Isabeau, which sank when she was escaping the attacking Barbarians. To learn about the legend, make the round-trip hike from Bretaye – you can learn to fish, have a drink at the Restaurant du Lac des Chavannes and even take a dip in the water (if you dare).

If you'd prefer to traverse Villars-Gryon on two wheels, no problem: around 135km of mountain bike trails wind through the valleys and over craggy rocks.

Les Diablerets, which sits at the foot of an immense mountain chain topped by one of Switzerland's most beautiful glaciers, is walking heaven too. There are easy family hikes and trails soaring everywhere between 1,200m and 3,200m. Perhaps most exhilarating, though, is the new 107m-long Peak Walk – the world's highest suspension bridge that connects two





summits. From it, you can spot Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn, the Eiger and – with luck – a few bearded vultures. On a clear day, you'll be gazing out over almost a third of Switzerland.

If you're going to head out on a hike, you need the right attire. Founded in Switzerland over 150 years ago, Mammut ([www.mammut.ch](http://www.mammut.ch)) is the perfect partner for your trip. Every item of Mammut clothing, footwear and equipment has been designed to keep you warm, dry and comfortable, from the first step to the last.

## WINE & DINE

All that outdoor activity can make you hungry – but that's not a problem here. In the Lake Geneva region, food is a serious business. With over 1,000 restaurants, it is the capital of cuisine in Switzerland, with cheese fondue, raclette, smoked sausage and fish (sourced straight from Lake Geneva) all firm favourites. Also, the Swiss never let anything go to waste, and that includes the many mountain flowers and plants, which are often picked fresh and served up straight from the meadows.

If you're still looking for something hands-on, have a go at cheesemaking at one of the alpine dairy farms or take a tasty lesson in the art of chocolate.

## FREE ACCESS

Summer in Switzerland is excellent value. In Les Diablerets and Villars-Gryon, visitors can get hold of a Free Access Card ([www.free-access.ch](http://www.free-access.ch)) – if you visit the resorts between 30 May and 25 October you'll receive a card that gives you 30 freebies!

The card covers all sorts of activities. As well as free access to ice rinks, swimming pools, tennis courts and more, there are free guided walks, including historic village hikes and a trek among vineyards in the Rhone valley, which finishes up with a refreshing tasting session.

The card also covers mountain transport, so you can catch free rides on gondolas, funiculars and alpine buses, to better access all that wonderful wilderness.

## EXPLORING MORE

There's plenty to see beyond Villars-Gryon and Les Diablerets too – for example, the exciting, vibrant cities of Lausanne and Montreux are less than an hour away. And, thanks to the Swiss Travel System ([www.myswitzerland.com/rail](http://www.myswitzerland.com/rail)) you can enjoy stress-free travel by road, rail and waterway throughout the country. STS offers a range of special tickets and fares for visitors, enabling you to see all that this ravishing region has to offer.



## HOW TO WIN

**Switzerland Tourism** is offering you and a friend the chance to win a week's trip to Villars-Gryon and Les Diablerets. The prize includes flights, four-star half-board accommodation, two first-class Swiss Travel Passes and two Free Access Cards. It also includes £545 worth of top Mammut kit. To enter, simply answer the following question:

**Q.** Deep Purple's famous 'Smoke on the Water' was created by the band in a nearby town of the Lake Geneva region. Which one?

(a) Lausanne (b) Montreux (c) Morges

The prize trip must be taken by 25 October 2015. To enter (and for full terms and conditions), go to [wanderlust.co.uk/competitions](http://wanderlust.co.uk/competitions) or send your answer to the Wanderlust office (see address on p2). The closing date is 5 August 2015. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by Wanderlust or sponsors.

For more information visit [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)





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# PARADISE FOUND

Tropical good looks. Friendly locals. Fascinating history. Easy living. Far-spread and little-visited Micronesia is one of travel's most postcard-perfect secrets

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **MARK STRATTON**





**P**ropelled by the inky blue Pacific swell, our Zodiac burst through the atoll's foaming barrier reef into a translucent bottle-green lagoon of tropical corals. It was then that I heard the singing. Lamotrek's islanders waited on a sandy beach under a coconut-palm canopy, singing and clapping rhythmically. Men in loincloths displayed tattoos lifted from the bible and the sea while bare-breasted women in homespun banana-fibre *lava-lava* sarongs shimmied considerable childbearing hips. Everybody was daubed with golden turmeric paste.

Wading ashore, I was garlanded with flowery *leis* and soon shaking hands with seemingly all 320 islanders. Their welcome was as warm as the sky overhead. One elderly lady stooped to kiss my hand; a toddler stared with wide-eyed terror at the white devil emerging from the sea. Lamotrek's Catholic Deacon, Xavier, greeted us, saying they rarely encounter foreigners on this atoll, part of the Federated States of Micronesia. "Even our supply ship is four months late," he lamented. "We've run out of sugar and cigarettes."

Throughout the day the islanders demonstrated weaving and knotting fishing-nets; they ferried us across their lagoon on a single-hulled outrigger canoe, and I spotted a turtle amid the corals. Later, as islander Francis poured me sweet and intoxicating *falupwa* (fresh coconut palm wine), he elaborated on their routine. "We tap *falupwa* every morning, then fish until afternoon. Then we drink and relax from 3pm until dinner and continue drinking after," he explained. "But we don't fish on Sundays – only church and drink."

## Terra obscura

The word 'paradise' is so overused these days it has almost become meaningless. Yet I wondered if I might have genuinely stumbled across its truest meaning in Micronesia? One of the least-visited frontiers on earth, Micronesia has a few tourist hotspots – such as Guam and Palau – but otherwise its remote islands, strewn across thousands of kilometres of the western North Pacific Ocean, remain extremely inaccessible.

Situated north of Papua New Guinea, Micronesia proper consists of Kiribati, several US dependencies (including Guam), Palau, the Marshall Islands, Nauru and the Federated States of Micronesia (or FSM). The latter's 607 sparsely inhabited volcanic islands and coral atolls – including Lamotrek – span two longitudinal time zones.

Originally settled several millennia ago by canoe migrations from Austronesia and South-East Asia, the FSM was purloined by the Spanish who sold it to Germany in 1899, before it was awarded to Japan in 1914. American post-WWII jurisdiction resulted in FSM becoming an independent federation of four archipelagic states (Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae) in 1986. Ethnolinguistically, Micronesians are similar to Polynesians albeit possessing different customs.

I Googled 'FSM' before I went away. The top hit was the 'Flying Spaghetti Monster' – the noodly deity of comedy religion Pastafarianism. This reaffirmation of the federation's obscurity only heightened my anticipation.

## Melanesian beginnings

I'd long salivated about exploring Micronesia's remotest atolls – to see if it lived up to its reputation, to meet its shrinking populations – yet my attempts foundered on the logistics of getting around by ►



**(Very) warm  
welcome**  
The islanders of  
Lamotrek – all 320  
of them – don't see  
many visitors







**‘Snorkelling inside the Njari islands was sensational. I spent hours in 25°C water exploring coral gardens flush with vivid starfish, clownfish, pufferfish, giant clams and leopard-spotted sea cucumbers.’**

◀ irregular cargo ships. My opportunity came courtesy of one of the few passenger ships exploring Micronesia, the *Silver Discoverer*.

Flying to the Solomon Islands via Brisbane, I was greeted at the Honiara docks by a sleek, 103m-long expedition cruise ship.

I joined 62 fellow passengers checking onto the luxurious vessel that would make the 17-day voyage across Micronesia to Palau. The ship's Zodiacs would enable beach landings on the smallest atolls with an expedition team that included a dive master, marine biologist and historian, led by 44-year-old Bavarian geologist, Stefan Kredel.

It would take us six days to reach Micronesia on our 5,900km voyage. Initially we sailed north-westwards through Melanesia along the Solomon Islands, stopping within the 700 sq km saltwater Marovo Lagoon, which is enclosed by a double barrier reef. Sheltered from the Pacific, the snorkelling inside Marovo at Lumalihe and Njari islands was sensational. I spent hours in 25°C seawater exploring coral gardens flush with clownfish, vivid starfish, pufferfish, giant clams and leopard-spotted sea cucumbers.

Our first port of call was Rabaul on the eastern side of New Britain island, some 60km off Papua New Guinea's mainland. We docked in





**People power**  
Micronesia is full of fascinating encounters (from bottom left): the welcome committee on Lamotrek; swimmers on Lumalihe; Rabaul's Bainang fire dancers; Woleia; Lamotrek's fishermen

Simpson Harbour, part of a drowned caldera of an extinct super-volcano that has spawned a bayside arc of active cones; this includes menacing Mt Tavurvur, whose 1994 eruption obliterated Rabaul. However, this evening's pyrotechnics were provided by the local Bainang tribe's fire dance ceremony to exorcise evil spirits. Frenetic young Bainang men wearing full-bodied masks of bug-eyed mosquitoes, butterflies and something approximating Donald Duck, trampled barefoot over a bonfire sending embers cascading into the dark. "They work themselves into a frenzy so do not feel the burning," local guide Georgina told me.

In the morning, our vessel veered north into Micronesia crossing the equator into the Northern Hemisphere. Onboard distractions during our two long days at sea included pilates classes on deck, where I gazed at frigatebirds from contorted positions. Lectures ranged from fish identification to Micronesian culture. Especially interesting was Tua Pittman, a burly Cook Islander holding the honoured title of 'Master Pwo Navigator'. Micronesia is famed for navigators following the traditions of their forefathers by negotiating inter-island Pacific voyages using the stars. "We have to memorise maps of stars in both hemispheres. If it's cloudy then we use the sun's location or wave patterns," he explained.

It was under those stars that my days typically ended, sitting on the pool deck, eating tuna and plump prawns from the hot rock barbecue.

## Land ahoy

After 44 hours at sea, Kapingamarangi – FSM's southernmost outpost – appeared on the horizon. I've rarely seen such a striking seascape. Thirty-three wooded islets align around the barrier reef's rim like an emerald necklace enclosing the 5km-wide mid-ocean lagoon. From satellite images the atoll is shaped like a teardrop; from the ocean, the islets optically bend with the curvature of the broad horizon.

The reef gap was too narrow for our ship to enter the lagoon so our Zodiacs zoomed towards two of Kapingamarangi's four inhabited islands, Touhou and Welua. Around 500 Kapingamarangians live here, conversing in an endemic language closer to Polynesian than Micronesian. Customs official Wayne Hadley greeted us in shorts and flip-flops. He told us that they were waiting for a supply ship to arrive to export their copra, which is processed into coconut oil.

There is a formulaic simplicity to island life across these atolls. Palm-thatched huts raised on platforms nuzzle beaches with outrigger canoes primed for fishing. The sole brick building is typically a Catholic church. The islanders' self-sufficiency shines through: beneath the palms and breadfruit trees, Kapingamarangians grate coconut for oil, fry fish, pulp taro, tap wine and collect rainwater. They are so far removed from the outside world that when we left behind ice cubes, the children cradled them in their hands like precious diamonds.

Yet life does present some stresses. Given Kapingamarangi's highest point is 90cm, the islanders often discuss sea-level rise – although their primary concern seems to be finding a spouse. "Everybody is related to each other," Wayne moaned. "You have to find a distant cousin to marry."

## People problems

The issue exercising Mayor Senard Leopold on the atoll of Nukuoro, a further night's sailing north, was depopulation. Only 200 islanders remain on Nukuoro – the smallest linguistic group in Micronesia. "Half our population is young children," said Senard. "The children leave for Pohnpei [FSM's island capital] to attend high school then maybe America for university. Once they experience Western life they don't want to return." ►









**Pacific mushrooms**  
The topography of  
Palau is some of the  
region's most striking





**Dancing with intent**  
Celebrating Yap Day on  
Woleia Atoll; (right)  
snorkelling with batfish



◀ Bucking this trend is Ramon, Nukuoro's chief prosecutor. I met him hanging up his morning tuna catch. Is there really much crime here, I asked.

"None really," he shrugged. "A couple of guys got drunk on palm wine a while back so I sent them home to sleep it off."

He left Nukuoro for Pohnpei to further his work prospects but returned. "Pohnpei was expensive and stressful," he said. "But life is paradise here, look around, everything you need to live is free."

## Sweet Caroline

The next day, we steamed westwards along 7°N latitude, the start of a remarkable week of cultural and historical experiences, tracing the Caroline Islands. On Pohnpei we visited Nan Madol, Micronesia's own Angkor Wat and the only ancient city built on a coral reef.

Pohnpei is one of the world's wettest places; accordingly, a torrential downpour was obscuring its black volcanic mountains.

"It pretty much rains always and then when you're not expecting it," said our Pohnpeian guide, Wilson, as we passed through the waterlogged, frangipani-fragrant jungle towards Nan Madol. Built between the 13th and 17th

centuries by the sea-worshipping Saudeleur dynasty, the site spans 92 artificially-made islets divided by Venetian-style waterways. Each islet served different functions, including one for human sacrifices and another where priests fed sacred eels with turtle meat. During the Saudeleur-era, Pohnpei hosted 30,000 people, just shy of today's population, but Nan Madol fell into disrepair after the dynasty was overthrown in 1628.

In hammering rain, I waded across a thigh-deep channel to the Royal Mortuary where Saudeleur kings once laid. The architecture is broodingly unusual: maroon hexagonal and polygonal columns of basalt lava skillfully stacked herringbone-style to fashion walls reaching 7.6m. Modern Pohnpeians consider this a place of malignant spirits because the Saudeleur were reputedly cruel; my own shivers were courtesy of rivulets of rainwater sliding down my back.

It was 30 years of Japanese rule, until 1945, that sent shivers down the Micronesians' spines, dragging them into a terrible Pacific conflict with the US and Allied forces. The aftermath of this was evident two days later, when we entered Chuuk's immense 2,129 sq km lagoon. Beneath the lagoon lies the wreckage of an extensive Japanese naval fleet, destroyed in February 1944 by the Americans during Operation Hailstone. Some 50 sunken vessels and 275 aircraft make for eerily spectacular snorkelling. We swam to a zero fighter lying upside-down, ghostly pallid in the sediment. Then we snorkelled around a small Japanese naval patrol vessel, resting upright just below the surface; a ragged portside gash revealed its violent end, yet the vessel is undergoing a vibrant reincarnation as a coral reef, teeming with polyps and electric-blue damselfish.

Ships bells, sake flasks and brass diving-helmets are among the artefacts from the sunken fleet housed nearby inside Moen Island's Kimio Aisek Museum. "The raid was payback by the Americans for Pearl Harbour," the museum assistant explained.

Yap State arrived further west along the Carolines, delivering two heart-warming cultural days on Lamotrek and Woleia atolls. After Lamotrek's heartfelt welcome, we made a course adjustment to gatecrash Woleia's annual cultural holiday: Yap Day. We glided into Woleia's millpond-calm lagoon around 7am. Around us traditional



**'I spent hours in 25°C seawater exploring coral gardens flush with clownfish, vivid blue starfish, pufferfish, giant clams, and leopard-spotted sea cucumbers'**

canoes ferried scattered populations from around the atoll to the main island, Falalop, for the festivities.

Falalop's beach was already crowded with picnicking families sharing banana leaf platters of pumpkin stew and susu taro, sweetened with

coconut. The young men at sea demonstrated how to right sunken canoes while the dance performances sent the islanders crazy with whoops and catcalls. It was both joyous and suggestive. The grass-skirted male dancers' pelvic thrusting was a Chippendales reinterpretation of Morris dancing with the vigour of a haka.

"You're lucky to see this," confided island elder, Martin Yangirelmar. "The youngsters want a more Western way of life and in future years our island may be deserted."

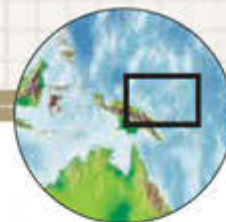
## Setting sun

The Micronesian traverse approached its end via Yap Island, where stone money is still used ceremonially for wedding dowries (the coins resemble millstones, some 5m-wide). We then pushed on to FSM's most westerly outpost, the Ngulu atoll (population: eight), where I met George Mangthaw, who hadn't left his tiny island since 1997. "There were 20 of us back then before the others left for Yap to drive cars, watch movies and eat chicken," he complained.

We finally reached the western edge of Micronesia after arcing to 15°E. An independent archipelago of 586 islands, Palau offers the voyage's most spellbinding scenery of wooded limestone pedestals rising like toadstools from a luminescent sea striped by multiple shades of blue.

I joined a snorkelling trip to Palau's UNESCO World Heritage-listed Rock Islands. After witnessing the finest diversity of tropical fish I'd ever seen at the 'Big Drop', I swam in Jellyfish Lake among eight million, dinner-plate-size yellowish-pink jellyfish. The creatures have evolved in isolation with no predators so are sting-less. They bounced off my mask like dodgems; my feet unavoidably caressed their squidgy forms. Those above me floated surreally like UFOs, phantasmagorically lit by sunrays scything into the surface seawater. A typical technicolour day in, yes, I think I'm going to say it: paradise. 🌴





# Micronesia Footnotes

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Capital:** Palikir (Pohnpei island)  
**Population:** 106,000 (FSM)  
**Language:** English is widely spoken alongside local Micronesian languages.  
**Time:** GMT+10-GMT+11  
**International dialling code:** +691  
**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals  
**Money:** US dollar (US\$), currently US\$1.50 to the UK£; Solomon Island dollar (SBD), currently SBD12 to the UK£.

## When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

Simply, it never gets cold in Micronesia. Temperatures average around 26°C with a tropical equatorial humid climate year round. **■ Generally the drier season.** Can be humid, but this is ameliorated by trade winds (particularly March-October). Significant dates include Yap National Day (first week of March) and National Culture Day (30 March). **■ Considered typhoon-cyclone season,** though storms can form outside this period as Cyclone Pam (Vanuatu, March 2015) proved. July to October are theoretically the wettest months although on Pohnpei it rains most days – the island is deluged with 7,600mm annually.

**Health & safety**  
**No tropical diseases** of note. Travellers with specific health concerns should be aware that the nearest hospital may be some distance away. Those travelling independently at sea during cyclone season must **check forecasts**.

## Further reading & information

visit-micronesia.fm  
 visit-palau.com  
 visitsolomons.com.sb  
 papuanewguinea.travel  
 visit Yap.com  
 kosrae.com  
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## ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ Pacific blue lagoon, Palau – issue 67
- ◆ South Pacific travel blueprint: 4 breathtaking itineraries – issue 87
- ◆ Micronesia travel guide

## THE TRIP

The author travelled with **Silversea Cruises** (0844 251 0837, silversea.com) aboard the *Silver Discoverer*. The 17-day **Remote Cultures of The Coral Sea** voyage from Honiara to Palau starts from £8,505pp based on two sharing. All cabins are classed as suites and all meals, drinks and activities (including diving and snorkelling) are included; international flights are not included. Silversea's next Micronesia voyage is the 16-day *Koror to Lautoka (Fiji)*, departing 28 September 2015; it costs from £9,650pp.

On Palau, snorkelling tours to Jellyfish Lake can be arranged with **Sam's Tours** (samstours.com); these cost £70 plus a £65 conservation permit.

## Getting there

The author flew with **Singapore Airlines** (0208 9616993, singaporeair.com) to Brisbane. Flights cost from £660 return; flight time is 24hrs. Onward flights to Honiara with **Solomon Airlines** (01293 874 924, flysolomons.co.uk) cost from £330 return; flight time 3hrs 15mins. On the return, he flew **United Airlines** (0207 136 0582, united.com) from Palau to Manila, then **Emirates** (0344 800 2777, emirates.com) via Dubai to London.

## Getting around

It is difficult to get to the remotest atolls. An island hopper operated by **United Airlines** (united.com) links the populated islands of Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae with Los Angeles and Hawaii.

**Getting to the remoter atolls is by ship only.** Field Service Ships take passengers and cargo to communities like

Kapingamarangi and Nukuoro but they have irregular schedules and are best arranged once in Micronesia. Crewing on a yacht is another possibility. Some of these options are considered in blogs at [www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com).

## Cost of travel

The **largest expense is getting to Micronesia** – the combined cost of flights on this trip was £1,500. Only larger islands have mid-range hotels (expect to pay around £80-100pp). Take small denomination US dollar notes onto the atolls as locals sell inexpensive souvenirs such as shell necklaces, woodcarvings, masks and stone money.

## Accommodation

**Solomon Kitano Mendana** (Solomon Islands; kitanomendana.com) offers a mix of garden- and sea-view rooms. Doubles without breakfast from SBD1,155 (£100) incl tax.

**Blue Lagoon Resort** (Chuuk; [truk-lagoon-dive.com](http://truk-lagoon-dive.com)) offers motel-style accommodation on a divine beach. Doubles from US\$147 (£95).

**Manta Ray Bay Resort** (Yap; [mantaray.com](http://mantaray.com)) is a divers' haunt with a restaurant on a ship. Doubles without breakfast from US\$149pp (£97).

**Sea Passion Hotel** (Koror; [seapassionhotel.com](http://seapassionhotel.com)) is a pleasant coastal hotel with big rooms, a pool and sea views. Doubles from £194.

## Food & drink

Island food centres on **fish and starchy staples**. Tuna and rainbow runner are eaten with taro, breadfruit, yam and bananas. Pork is often saved for ceremonial occasions while coconut features heavily. Drinks include palm wine and locals brews such as **sakau**, a pepper shrub concoction popular on Pohnpei. Avoid the ubiquitously chewed tooth-rotting betel nut.

## MICRONESIA HIGHLIGHTS

### 1 Stone money, Yap

Stone money (*ra*) is scattered around all over Yap. Some 31,000 of these circular limestone discs remain; they are now only used ceremonially. They originate from Palau.

### 2 Mangrove kayaking, Yap

Kayaking through the tidal mangroves on western Yap reveals exotic birdlife such as the endemic Yap monarchs plus giant fruit bats.

### 3 Lelu ruins, Kosrae

Around 100 walled compounds built from basalt form the striking jungle ruins of a settlement dating back to 1400.

### 4 WWII diving, Chuuk

Chuuk (Truk) Lagoon offers the finest WWII wreck diving in the world. Star dives include the armed cargo ship, *Fujikawa Maru* and 38m-long destroyer, *Fumitsuki*.

### 5 Nan Madol, Pohnpei

This ancient lava city built by the Saudeleur dynasty would be best seen from a kayak.


### 6 Snorkelling atolls

Sheltered lagoons host coral gardens redolent with 172 hard corals and 250 reef fish species. Snorkellers should spot reef sharks, mantas and turtles.





# A SERIOUSLY WARM WELCOME



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# FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers



★ WINNER ★  
**Life and death on safari in the Masai Mara**

By Jackie Freshfield

It's one of nature's most exhilarating yet shocking annual events. Over a million animals cross Kenya's Mara River in the annual migration, but thousands die on the journey. Although I grew up in Kenya and went on safari most school holidays, my siblings and I were deemed 'too young' to accompany my parents when they went to camp in the Masai Mara.

Years later I decided it was time to do a 'proper' dawn-to-dusk Mara migration safari, maximising the time spent watching the spectacular ungulate display, and absorbing the incredible sight of millions of animals crossing the river to get to the new grasslands beyond. My dreams were realised in 2011 on an incredible trip to the Mara in August, prime migration time.

The river crossing that seared itself into my memory was at the infamous 'Cul de Sac' on the Mara; it was a frenzy of life and death that made *Lord of the Rings* look like a playground tiff. Thousands of antelope crowded onto the narrow riverbank, massed like stressed commuters in the London rush hour. Choking dust rose as the animals jostled for position, their baying producing a cacophony of sound; as more arrived the sounds turned desperate.

Unable to turn back, one brave animal took the plunge and leapt into the churning waters of the Mara River. One by one the migrants took their chances, thrashing and splashing as they lurched across the coursing torrents of murky river water.

■ Your Story

## Safari stories

At [wanderlust.co.uk](http://wanderlust.co.uk), we run regular online writing competitions. Here are the best from our latest, three tales of the African wild...



They had to battle against the flailing limbs of their fellow migrants, while the force of the current was such that weaker animals, particularly calves, got swept downstream into the paths of marauding crocodiles and vultures who wasted no time grabbing them for a snack. Others drowned as they got sucked underwater in the mêlée, their legs sticking in the air as they eventually drifted downstream.

It was the most visceral scene I had ever witnessed.

The river crossing was just the start. Once the animals had exhausted themselves in the water, they struggled ashore at the bottom of a sheer 25-foot cliff on the far bank, and the only way to get away was to climb up. Many animals that had suffered broken limbs when trampled in the mass exodus lay forlornly in the water, while the majority clambered up the slippery banks, stepping on their erstwhile travelling companions who lay dying on the rocks below. And that *still* wasn't the end. Predators patrolled the cliffs, picking off the weakest animals as they emerged at the top: the larder was full if you were a lion, hyena or jackal.

Although filling memory cards was the order of the day, we soon put our cameras down and simply watched, open-mouthed at the extraordinary drama playing out in front of us. As the manic crossings slowed, the churning water calmed; cadavers floated past, orphaned calves bleated on the riverbank; doomed wildebeest with broken legs staggered pathetically in the mud.

What an incredible morning. Truly an unmatched spectacle, and the holy grail of wildlife photography.





## ★ RUNNER UP ★ **Weather the storm**

By ATP Travels

Late afternoon is a beautiful time to go for a game drive. Dappled, earthy light cloaks ground and animals alike. Aglow in the dusk, giraffes strike a pose, nibble at treetops. A herd of elephants file past, their adorable calves tripping along under their parents' legs.

As the sun bids its rapid equatorial adieu, the sky blazes 50 shades of red on one side of the river, while aggressive flashes of fork lightning illuminate the ominous grey horizon on the other. We gaze over the River Luangwa, watching the elephants plod peacefully off, spotting hippos and surrender our souls to this idyllic Africa.

"Kumbuku, kumbuku!" Excited chattering crackles over the radio – it is a tip-off for a leopard sighting. Lurching the gears of our ancient but trusty open-air Defender, our guide, Moses, speeds off at full pelt, whipping the jeep through the darkness, while the other ranger shines a spotlight into the trees, hunting out reflective eyes.

"In 11 years of going on safari, I've never seen a leopard," declares Saskia. She'd never



experienced rain on a game drive either... Tonight is to be her lucky night.

Suddenly, several things happen in quick succession. The guide's spotlight falls upon a leopard, slinking out of the darkness, its muscly frame just metres from our vehicle. Whirling the light round, he picks out a rare glimpse of another leopard feeding on an impala kill, hanging awkwardly in the branches of a tree, all splayed limbs and blood.

Our silent elation in witnessing the big five's prize jewel is momentary. The heavens

open – the nut-dry air is suddenly full of thick, fat, African rain spewing from the sky, soaking everything in moments. Out of nowhere, a gale force wind gathers breath, sucking heat from the day. Our driver is racing into the blackness through newly formed puddles, issuing orders to grab ponchos and dry boxes for our equipment.

"Row, row, row your boat..." someone pipes up merrily on the bumpy, wet drive back to camp, where, oblivious to our soggy plight, it remained miraculously dry.



## ★ HIGHLY COMMENDED ★ **Lions in the long grass**

By Dom Tulett

Days and nights in the Serengeti.  
Safari drives and open camping.

The main draw, of course, is the big cats. For hours we search for them, but none want to be found. I like that it's not too easy. There are dozens of giraffes and hundreds of gazelles and, heads propped over each other's shoulders to scan for danger, countless pairs of zebras. Uppity secretary birds, sulking warthogs, bored vultures, pompous buffaloes. Plenty of each of them. But still no cats. Our jeep rolls on through the sandy brush.

Clouds gather over the endless plains. Our guide points out a pair of black rhinos far in the distance. Someone mistakes a curved branch of a tree for a leopard's tail. We pause, strain our eyes, resign, and move on. Many false alarms. Your mind plays tricks on you.

Daylight fades, the sun softens. Leafless trees stab at the sky like a Halloween dream. The jeep stops. Our driver leans across the passenger seat, narrowing his eyes at the grass. Everyone's on lookout.

"Lions."



"Where?"

"On the left of the vehicle."

"I can't see them."

"In line with the tree."

"I still can't see them."

"Just there." Our driver points and a flick of a tail gives them away. Two lions, barely visible, only a few yards from our jeep, just sitting in the long sandy grass, not hiding but hidden. Your mind plays tricks on you – you don't see things that are there.

As the day closes we're driven to our campsite – a football pitch-sized area cut into the grass; no fences, no barriers, just

sandy grass surroundings and prayers that the lions aren't close. A large campfire is lit as we assemble the lightweight tents. We cook over the fire, keeping eyes on the long grass. We drink wine with the meal as the sun quickly sets, and the guides tell us stories of campers and lions getting a little too close together. Their two pieces of advice for the night: don't take the wine into your tent – the animals will smell the fruit and come looking for it; and, if you need to go to the toilet in the night, don't.

The sun disappears, leaving just the light of the fire and, at the dirt-track entrance to the campsite, two pairs of yellow dots in the blackness – hungry hyenas looking for scraps.

The guides turn in for the night, choosing to sleep in the jeeps, leaving us to the fire, wine and wildlife. Quickly to bed, zipping the tent as tight as it'll go, hoping to sleep but trying not to, listening and wondering to the chirps and calls and rustles. The world's alive now. Perhaps the cats are looking for us. Their own safari. We're hiding, but not hidden, from the lions in the long grass.

Keep an eye out for our next writing competition at [wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust/forum](http://wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust/forum) ►



■ Readers' Pictures

# YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email [fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk](mailto:fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk) – make us jealous!



"Walking with my wife on the Jinshanling section of the **Great Wall of China**. A great section – much steeper than we expected but minus the crowds."  
*Martin Simpson*



"Trying to pull our wonderful ship, the **Ocean Nova**, through the sea ice of **Hanusse Bay**, south of the Antarctic Circle along the **Antarctic Peninsula**." *Richard & Julie Redfern*



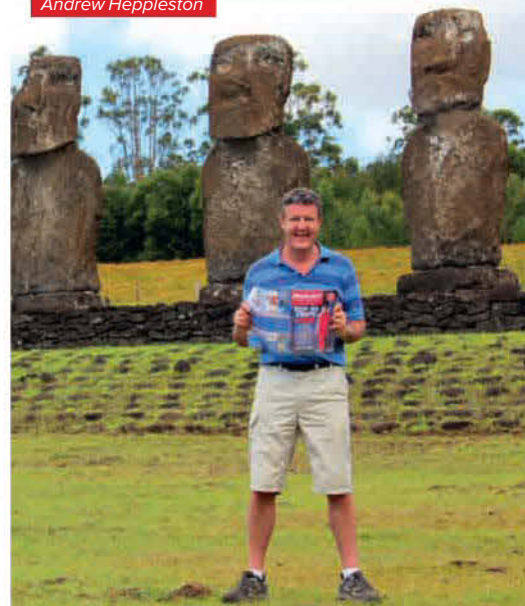
"In **Tanzania**, reaching the highest point in Africa!"  
*Leonie Macaulay*





"Camping on the Triund Hills (over 2,800m above sea level), Himachal Pradesh, India."  
Himmat Sihag

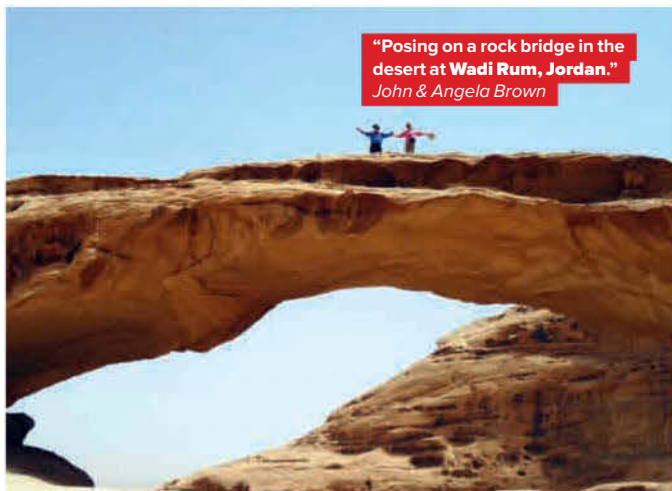
"Finally made it to **Easter Island**, to appreciate first-hand the moai statues, volcanic craters and Birdman culture. For a small island it packs in a lot of history and intriguing sites."  
Andrew Heppleston



## Where does your Wanderlust take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including a versatile **High UV with Insect Shield Buff®** – the ultimate travel accessory (RRP £21). But can you do better than Andrew (above)? We want to see where your *Wanderlust* takes you and where you take your *Wanderlust*!

Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at @wanderlustmag, email it to [fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk](mailto:fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk) or hashtag it #wanderlustmag on Instagram.



"Posing on a rock bridge in the desert at Wadi Rum, Jordan."  
John & Angela Brown



"Standing outside the Sultan's Palace in Muscat, Oman. Wearing an *abaya* caused some stares from fellow travellers but I received lots of compliments from the locals and it kept me cool in 35°C heat!"  
Pam Gardiner





# LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, Palestinian praise, Bermudan bemusement and tall tales from Kenya's tallest via ferrata

## ◀ Delightful Dervla

Thank you for interviewing Dervla Murphy and reviewing her latest book, *Between River and Sea* [*Wanderlust* April 2015, issue 155].

I went to Palestine two years ago for two unforgettable weeks and her book is the best, most honest and furiously correct book I've read in quite a while.

She is right. One can't be neutral.

The book is maybe a little long – she reports conversations with everyone she meets – but that's normal, because everyone in Palestine has a sad and sickening story to tell, which one wants to pass on.

She is a very plucky 'granny' to go trotting around, everywhere she can, and also on little mountain paths, where stones are thrown at her.

Through all the sad, nearly unbelievable stories she tells, she always has her surprisingly great sense of humour. I can't recommend this book enough.  
*Philip Lippens, via email*

## What beach?

I smiled when I read *Wanderlust* reader Rhoda Allen's Travel Experience in From the Road [*April 2015, issue 155*]. I am also from Bermuda and recall how, when I was five in 1979, we flew to England to visit my grandmother.

She surprised us with a train trip to Brighton. The sea, I was told! The beach! So, as my feet hurt on the pebbles at Brighton with my ice cream, I found myself wondering where the beach actually was.



## ★ STAR LETTER ★

### Via ferrata dilemma

It was fascinating to read about the world's adrenalin-charged dangerous walks [*May 2015, issue 156*]. I noticed that Mt Kinabalu got a mention as home to the world's highest via ferrata. It has in all likelihood lost that record.

In 2014 I climbed Point Lenana on Mt Kenya. The last bit of the climb was a via ferrata that proclaimed itself the world's highest.

The project to build via ferrata 'Olonana' at 4,985m above sea level, breaking the record held by Mt Kinabalu at 3,800m above sea level, was commissioned by Kenya Wildlife services in 2012. So, only a recent event, which may explain Google searches still turning out Mt Kinabalu as the answer to the 'highest via ferrata'.

*Nandini Chakraborty, Leicester*

I couldn't see any pink sand or crystal-blue waters. So, Rhoda, England continued to surprise Bermudian children 50 years on!  
*Carolyn Thomas Ray, Bermuda*

## Pre-trip tips

I just finished reading the magazine [*June/July 2015, issue 157*] and have to say that the Kenya article really inspired me – not least because I love elephants and wish I could do more to help them. The natural phenomena was inspiring too, and I read the Venice pocket guide with interest, even though

I've been there before, as I'll be heading back this summer.

*Rachelle Meilleur, via website*

## Aussie speed rules

While not condoning speeding, be aware that in Australia different states have different speed limits, and that the norm is to have only one sign when the limit changes as you come in or out of restricted areas.

Adding to that is a system where the limit is what it says and 3mph over the limit may mean a \$400 fine, plus costs. Take care!

*John Sharvill, via email*

## WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time, congratulations to Nandini!





## ■ Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



**Swaziland**  
myWanderlust  
member Jane  
Baxter retraces  
her ten-day  
safari trip

**The highlight:** Getting close to rhino and seeing them safe, protected by an excellent anti-poaching system.

**Must see:** This was the best rhino viewing I have had anywhere. The white rhino were so relaxed, and I saw at least ten on each game drive in one park.

**Top tip:** Try to get a variety of activities organised to make the most of your stay.

**Cautionary tale:** It's not easy to get game drives as a single traveller in



some national parks. If you're the only one wanting to go you have to wait for a group and join them – or pay for two.

**I wish I'd known...** How inexpensive the lovely handmade crafts are – I should have taken a bigger bag!

**Anything else?** Swaziland is a tiny gem. Good roads, fabulously friendly people, great safaris, stunning and widely varied scenery, comfortable lodges and very inexpensive.

## This month you have been mostly...

**W** Getting cultured in the capital of Laos, spending a few days exploring the monuments and parks of Vientiane. [GThai](#)

**T** Eager to retrace the best American rail journeys. I'm so ready to go back and do all these again! [@wanderlustmag](#)

[EllieRoss102](#)

**W** Motorbiking solo across Chile. Amazing trip! Adrenaline and contact with nature. And of course, on a motorcycle it was the best!

[Jota Roxo](#)

**f** Reminiscing about a trip to Kiso Valley – my favourite place in Japan. Also stayed at Fujioto and walked a section of the Nakasendo Highway. Would highly recommend. [Jolene Moore](#)

**T** Using the fuel from one trip to spark another. Sometimes a holiday just makes you want to plan another holiday... [@wanderlustmag](#)

[lovelyjojo](#)

**W** On safari in Botswana. My best day ever following lions following buffalo in the Okavango Delta.

[Sophiesandford](#)

**f** Dreaming of cycling New Zealand's Otago Central Rail Trail. I would like to bike that route when I get down to that part of the globe. [Travelling Claus](#)

**W** Getting wowed by water. An unforgettable flight over the Victoria Falls. Microlighting over them was just bonkers! [jackiefreshfield](#)

## PHOTO OF THE MONTH

**Fantastic Fitz Roy, Patagonia**

[Stephen Morris](#)

A four-hour hike brought me to the 'wall': a steep, rocky slope up to the Laguna de los Tres viewpoint. It was a tough and unforgiving climb, but all that was forgotten the moment I reached the top and saw the splendour of the Fitz Roy massif and the turquoise lagoon below.

I sat there totally mesmerised wishing only for the cloud that shrouded the tip of Fitz Roy to disappear. Later, as I was leaving, I glanced back for one final look. Suddenly, the pesky little cloud that had seemed so attached to the peak began to melt away. I whipped out my camera and starting snapping.



**TALK TO US:** Online at [www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust). **Email** [fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk](mailto:fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk). **Mail** Wanderlust, 1 Leworth Place, Windsor SL4 1EB. **Twitter** [@wanderlustmag](#) **Facebook** [www.facebook.com/wanderlusttravelmagazine](http://www.facebook.com/wanderlusttravelmagazine) **Instagram** [@wanderlustmag](#)





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Carpathians before  
everyone else





*Wanderlust*

13

# WILDEST FRONTIERS

Want to escape the crowds, go beyond the brochures and feel like a proper pioneer? Then try these, our pick of the hottest offbeat spots...





## 1 RUSSIAN FAR EAST ALTERNATIVE SLICE OF SIBERIA

Most Trans-Siberian travellers peel south on the Trans-Mongolian to Beijing, and a few continue east to Vladivostok. But there is another way across this frosty emptiness, via the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM). Completed in 1991, but only opened to tourists a decade later, the BAM runs for over 4,300km from Tayshet, negotiating Lake Baikal, Siberia and the Severomuisk Tunnel (Russia's longest) to finish at Sovetskaya Gavan on the Tatar Strait.

The more tourist-free option takes just over four days, if you don't hop off to spend time around the lake or visiting the BAM Museum in Tynda. In the latter, before too long, you'll be able to switch to the even more remote Amur-Yakutsk Mainline, a northbound link to the world's coldest city, due for completion in 2015/2016. Alternatively, disembark at Khabarovsk, where wildlife fans can head for the remote forest reserve of Durminskoye for a (hopeful) glimpse of the terrifyingly rare Amur tiger.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Lake Baikal, for hot baths and lakeside life; the neo-Renaissance architecture of Komsomolsk-na-Amure; Amur River trips from Khabarovsk; forays into tiger country; Tynda's BAM Museum; Bratsk Dam.

**NEED TO KNOW:** Travel Sept-Oct for Lake Baikal fall colours and to avoid summer crowds.



## 2 NORTHEAST GREENLAND NATIONAL PARK THE BIG EMPTY

Measuring 972,001 sq km, Northeast Greenland is the world's largest national park. It protects the entire top-right quarter of the Arctic island, and is bigger than most countries. Yet no people permanently live in it, and only 500-ish lucky souls visit each year. It's far from empty though: species such as polar bear, walrus, caribou, musk oxen, Arctic fox, eagles and ptarmigan live off the fragile tundra and sparkling ice caps while humpback, narwhal,

beluga, seals and seabirds puff, play and soar along the coast.

The geology is even more spectacular, with looming mountains, fjords serrating the shore and sculptural icebergs choking the channels. You might even see the northern lights, too.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Peary Land, the ice-free northern peninsula; superlative wildlife viewing; cruising with icebergs; nosing into inlets such as Alpefjord; Ittoqqortoormiit (Scoresbysund), the most isolated town in Greenland.

**NEED TO KNOW:** The best way to visit is via expedition cruise; some vessels sail Spitsbergen-Iceland via the Greenlandic coast. Operators will arrange permits. ►







### 3 PAKISTAN TROUBLED BEAUTY BACK ON THE MAP

Pakistan's mountainous north is almost matchless. Here, three mighty ranges – the Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindu Kush – collide; it's where you'll find biggies like Nanga Parbat and fearsome K2. And, somehow, the seemingly impossible Karakoram Highway cuts a precipitous dash amid it all. However, it's not a region without problems, which turned more specifically on tourists in 2013, when ten foreign climbers were killed at Nanga Parbat base camp. Things have improved though, and after a brief hiatus, now FCO advice has changed, some operators are resuming trekking trips here in 2015.

The classic here is the tough but manageable two-week-return hike to Concordia, a peak-hugged glacial bowl dubbed the 'Throne Room of the Mountain Gods'. Icy tongues ooze down 8,000m-ers, with K2 – at 8,611m, the world's second-highest – looming largest of all.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Karakoram Highway, one of the world's most dramatic roads; Concordia camping; Baltoro Glacier; Balti villages; Hunza Valley and Shangri La-like Karimabad.

**NEED TO KNOW:** The FCO currently advises against travel along the Karakoram Highway between Islamabad and Gilgit (among other areas of the country); flights into Skardu, the main access town for the Concordia trek, bypass the road.

Corbis/Getty





# 4 CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS, ROMANIA

## EUROPE'S LAST STAND?

Forming a 900km-long arc across the country, Romania's Carpathians have an extra edge. They're just that bit wilder than other European ranges. It's amid this mix of glacial, karst and volcanic peaks that the continent's big mammals – such as bears and wolves – are doing best. It's also where you'll find Central Europe's largest tract of continuous forest. Much of this is thanks


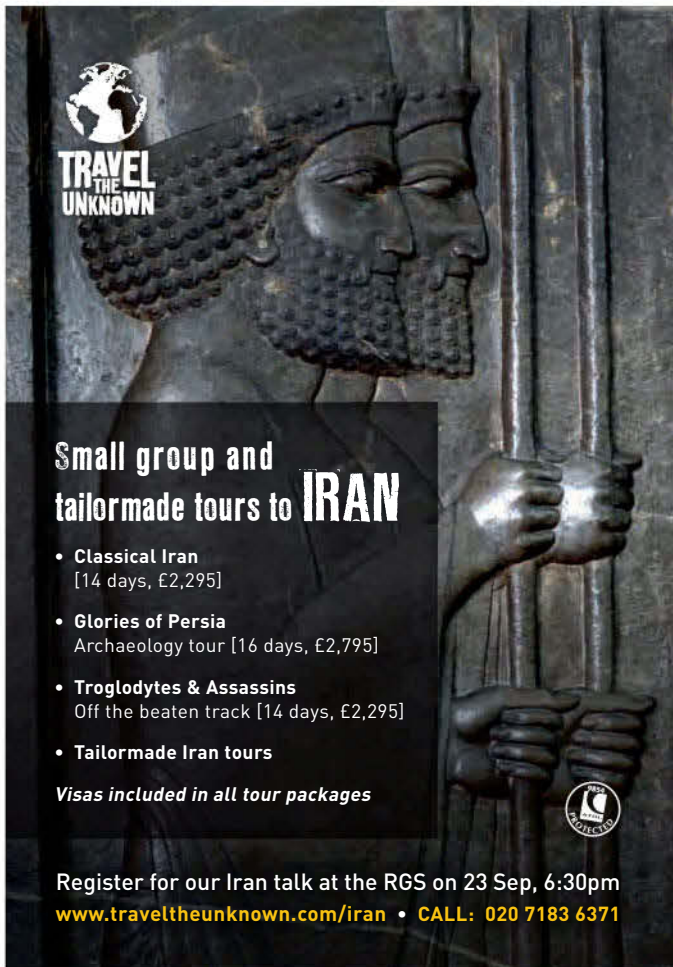
to the perseverance of traditional ways: farming methods have changed little here for centuries.

Head off on a hike (there is an large network of trails) and you might pass horses pulling carts, see shepherds wrapped in sheepskins and feel like you're in the Middle Ages.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Piatra Craiului, the Carpathian's highest limestone ridge; Bicz Gorges; wild Retezat NP; Aries Valley villages; brown bears; Moldoveanu (2,544m), Romania's highest peak.

**NEED TO KNOW:** The Carpathian Mountains are accessible from capital Bucharest; the mountain resort of Sinaia is just 120km north. ►



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[www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com)







## 6 IRAN THE NEW BURMA?

Ancient Persia – land of Silk Road caravanserais, deserts and snow-peaks, magnificent mosques and word-beating hospitality – should be on most travellers' bucket lists. But years of testy relations with the West and negative Foreign Office travel advice have kept many away. Until now.

Diplomatic tensions are easing and, although the FCO currently still advises against all but essential travel to all of Iran (plus all travel to within 100km of the Afghanistan border and within 10km of the Iraq border), curious types are starting to head there anyway. Tour operators are likening the country's 'opening up' to that of Burma, five years ago, when it became the hot new thing. In short, get there quick.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Isfahan's bridges; ancient Persepolis; Yazd's medieval bazaar; Shiraz, the City of Poets; the shrines of pilgrimage city Mashhad; hikes in the Zagros and Alborz Mountains.

**NEED TO KNOW:** FCO warnings can invalidate travel insurance – you may need to buy a specialist policy. Women must wear headscarves at all times.



## 7 TORNGAT MOUNTAINS, CANADA THE PLACE OF SPIRITS

No roads, no signs, no towns, no campsites – Atlantic Canada's Torngat Mountains NP makes those who visit work hard for the privilege. But what a privilege: this is 9,700 sq km of unspoiled, untarnished wilderness. The mountains here are high and daubed with glaciers; lakes and rivers barrel through dramatic valleys; fjords nibble into the iceberg-littered coast; polar bears, black bears, wolves and caribou herds patrol the lot.

Various cultures have lived here over the millennia; 'Torngat' comes from the Inuktitut word meaning 'place of spirits', as Inuit shamans would travel to these mountains to commune with spirit helpers. Today, exploring with an Inuit guide lends not only protection (from those polar bears) but also insight into the landscape. The park is dotted with archaeological evidence, from tent rings to burial sites, adding a human element to this supernatural realm.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Saglek Fjord; caribou migration; abandoned Inuit community of Hebron; Southwest Arm valley; coastal cruising; helicopter flights; Rose Island.

**NEED TO KNOW:** Access to the Torngats is via Goose Bay and/or Nain in Labrador, or Kangiqsualujjuaq in Nunavik (north Québec). ►



## 5 CHHATTISGARH & ORISSA, INDIA TRIBAL TREASURES

Millions of tourists head to India each year – but few of them head here. The neighbouring states of Orissa (Odisha) and Chhattisgarh (a breakaway portion of Madhya Pradesh) are mostly ignored by mass tourism yet offer an authentic insight into rural India, so often overlooked in favour of the subcontinent's big cities. There are towns and temples of interest, but much of the appeal of this north-eastern enclave – most easily accessible from Kolkata – is exploring the villages and meeting the people: the indigenous groups of the jungles around Jeypore; the tattoo-faced Kutia Kondh; the traditionally beaded and costumed Bondos of the Bondo Hills.

Don't miss a visit to a *haat*, a weekly market, to see tribal groups bartering over everything from butter to jewellery, and gathering to gossip over a *mahua*, the local brew.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Temples and gardens of Bhubaneswar; sacred Hindu site of Puri; Konark, on the Bay of Bengal; Maikal Hills; unique tribal villages; Koraput Tribal Museum; wood-carving village of Etikoppaka.

**NEED TO KNOW:** Raipur is the capital of Chhattisgarh; Bhubaneswar is the capital of Orissa. Both are served by flights from Kolkata (1.5hrs/1hr).



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## 9 AZERBAIJAN LAND OF FIRES

Oil, chess-whizz Gary Kasparov, more oil, winning the 2011 Eurovision... This may be all (or more than) you know about Azerbaijan. To say the Caucasus' largest nation is untouched by tourism is an understatement – few travellers make it here. But there is plenty to see, from old-meets-new capital Baku – where skyscrapers encircle a medieval walled old town of mosques and caravanserais – to a mountainous countryside of traditional rural villages; from strange lunar landscapes of mud volcanoes to the salty expanse of the Caspian Sea.

There's no escaping that oil and gas entirely though: Azerbaijan is famed for its energy reserves and Zoroastrian temples were built near natural vents, so their holy flames could keep on burning. **HIGHLIGHTS:** Icheri Sheher, Baku's old town; the Zoroastrian fire temple of Ateshgah; Sheki's frescoes and palaces; Caucasus hikes; Caspian Sea; craft shopping in Lahij; Naftalan healing-oil resort.

**NEED TO KNOW:** Direct flights from London to Baku take 5.5 hours. UK nationals require visas.



## 10 NORTH WEST HIGHLANDS GEOPARK, SCOTLAND A TRIP BACK THROUGH TIME

Geopark status is only given to areas of outstanding geological heritage. Well, the North West Highlands has this in spades. One of the most sparsely populated pieces of the continent (quite a claim for the crowded UK), it is home to some 3,000 million years of geology. Indeed, the area is dubbed the Cradle of Geology; it is here that thrust structures were first discovered and proved by pioneering Victorian geologists, and it is here that the earliest evidence of life in Europe can be found. All very educational and, fortunately, scenic too: the park encompasses pristine bays, unique caves, monolithic mountains and scattered isles that will impress rock experts and amateurs alike.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Pointy Ben Stack, allegedly inspiration for the Paramount logo; iconic Suilven; Smoo Cave; Knockan Crag cliffs; Cape Wrath; Loch Assynt; remote Sandwood Bay; Summer Isles kayaking; driving the Rock Route.

**NEED TO KNOW:** Planes, trains and buses run to Inverness, the nearest major hub. Tim Dearman Coaches runs a Cycle Bus service from Inverness to the north daily (except Sunday), May-September. ►



## 8 CHAD, CENTRAL AFRICA THE PLACE FOR PIONEERS

Chad is the big wide African unknown for all but a handful of determined travellers. We know this, because every year, when we're adding up the results of the *Wanderlust* Readers' Travel Awards, Chad always picks up votes – and glowing reports.

Lack of other tourists is a given. Local encounters – with Tubu nomads, Chari River fishermen and ethnic Bidayat and Zaghawa – are likely. Mind-blowing views of the Sahara, but not as you know it, are manifold: gaze out from the top of the Enneri Tao plateau, over the vast dunes of Mourdi and amid the Ennedi Mountains, surreal orange outcrops and slot canyons, dotted by desert lakes, dwarf crocodiles and ancient rock art.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Tibesti Mountains; the plateau of Enneri Tao; wide, wild Sahara-scapes; odd and amazing Ennedi rock formations; the colourful Ounianga Lakes; encounters with local ethnic groups and desert nomads.

**NEED TO KNOW:** The FCO currently advises against either 'all travel' or 'all but essential travel' to all of Chad, except the capital N'Djamena. You may need a specialist insurance policy.



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## 11 BURMESE HIMALAYA NEW MUST-SEE MOUNTAINS

Five years ago, Burma would have topped this 'wild frontiers' list. But since Aung San Suu Kyi dropped her opposition to visiting tourists in 2009, many have done just that, and Burma is firmly back on the map – and no longer quite so wild. Or at least, not all of it. Now, more intrepid travellers are looking for areas of the country away from the main sites – such as the north-western Burmese Himalaya, the easternmost extent of the peerless range.

This is not Nepal – the mountains aren't as high – but many are perennially snow-capped, and offer excellent, interesting and low-traffic trekking. Putao is a good base. From around here, hikes head out via hilltribe villages and virgin pine forest to a range of frosted peaks such as 3,635m Phongun Razi and 4,282m Phonyin Razi. Views from up top stretch to higher Himalayas and the plains of Assam.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Putao, nestled in the Himalayan foothills; traditional Rawan and Lisu tribal villages; wildlife spotting; peak bagging.

**NEED TO KNOW:** Indirect flights from Rangoon to Putao take from around 4.5 hours. UK nationals need a visa to visit Burma; e-Visas are now available online.

## 12 RÉUNION LOST WORLD IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

In many ways, Réunion is no frontier. This department of France, adrift in the Indian Ocean somewhere east of Madagascar, is relatively well discovered by tourists – mostly French. But the interior of the island, an angry, rumpled scrunch of green, feels utterly wild. Indeed, it could be a stand-in for a Jurassic Lost World: two volcanoes – one extremely active – have created a seemingly impenetrable canyon-riven lushness, where sheer slopes fall away into jungly valley bottoms; the whole place is dribbled by waterfalls, pocked by craters and serenaded by a rainbow of birds.

The hiking here is first-class: two long-distance trails (the GR R1 and GR R2) offer multi-day options, but there are numerous offshoots and day-walks – not least the 10.5km hike up to the bubbling Piton de la Fournaise, one of the world's most accessible active volcanoes.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** French-feel capital St-Denis; the three calderas, Cirque de Salazie, Cirque de Cilaos and Cirque de Mafate; Piton de la Fournaise; the dramatic setting and Creole mansions of Hell-Bourg; hiking; helicopter flights.

**NEED TO KNOW:** There are flights from Paris to Réunion (12hrs). Alternatively, fly to Mauritius to catch a short flight or ten-hour boat ride to Réunion.



## 13 GUINEA-BISSAU AFRICA'S UNKNOWN WEST

Tiny Guinea-Bissau may be wedged near Ebola-hit West Africa, but it didn't suffer a single case. And following successful democratic elections in 2014, the country is currently calm. This means it's prime time to visit one of the continent's least-known nations, and a few intrepid tour operators are venturing in, largely focusing on Guinea-Bissau's white-sand, wildlife-rich and rather unexpected Bijagós Archipelago.

Designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, these 88 islands – a mass of mangroves, mudflats, palm groves and forests – are home to an array of critters, from Nile crocodiles and rare saltwater hippos to African manatees and bottlenose dolphins; it's also a key site for green turtles, with 10,000 females hauling ashore here to lay their eggs.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Bissau's Portuguese-colonial architecture; tribal villages; Orango Island, home to hippos; Poilao Island, a breeding site for green turtles; Bubaque, the Bijagós Archipelago's largest village.

**NEED TO KNOW:** UK nationals require visas (apply via the Paris embassy). All travellers require yellow fever vaccination certificates.





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# AUSTRALIA'S **GALÁPAGOS**

Kangaroo Island is well named – but the thousands of roos that bound around are joined by a host of other Australian wildlife, best seen from new hiking trails

WORDS **MARTIN SYMINGTON**



**A leading light**  
The view towards Cape du Couedic on the south coast, from Flinders Chase National Park, Kangaroo Island





**P**eople get incredibly excited about driving into the middle of nowhere to watch koalas doing absolutely nothing,” observed wildlife guide Paul Boehm with a wry shake of his bush-hatted head. Paul’s trick is knowing where to find the particular trees whose leaves the koalas relish. Sure enough, in the crook of almost every manna gum in this patch of forest was a sleepy ball of grey fur. Faced with cuteness overload, our camera motors whirled into overdrive.

“Believe it or not, they are randy buggers,” Paul continued. The koalas of Kangaroo Island have multiplied to such an extent that they are decimating the gums, so a programme of birth control has been launched. Ear tags identify sterilised koalas – left for a buck, right for a doe. Island joke: how do you remember which is which? Women are always right.

Next, Paul drove us in his roo-bar-defended 4WD to Seal Bay, where a colony of around 1,000 Australian sea lions breed and pup. Protected these days, the species

was hunted almost to extinction and remains endangered though you might not guess it here. Unlike the furtive koalas, sea lions are anything but coy about mating. Big, blubbery bulls were blustering about on flippers, barking and charging at potential rivals while competing to herd sows into remonstrating harems. We watched their rumbustious couplings from our hiding place in the dunes – unnoticed, like all good voyeurs – while smells of salt, sex and sea lions gusted off the beach.

### Cast of creatures

Kangaroo Island, known as KI, is 20km off the South Australia coast. There are two ways to get there: a half-hour propeller-plane hop from Adelaide; or a choppy ferry ride from Cape Jarvis, a couple of hours by bus from the state capital. I chose the latter, winding through vineyards and glossy olive groves that underline the region’s Mediterranean climate.

On maps the island appears as a speck in the Great Australian Bight. However, at 150km long by 57km at its widest, it is larger than Kent. The population is a mere 4,500, with most residents living either in

Kingscote, the ‘capital’, and a scattering of other tiny settlements. This leaves swathes of human-free country; some is farmland, but a third of KI is national park or protected.

Koalas and sea lions are just two stars in the extravagant cast of creatures that lend KI the feeling of a huge nature reserve without fences. The island bounces, crawls, slobbers and soars with weird and wonderful wildlife. There are upwards of 60,000 kangaroos and perhaps twice as many wallabies. You find echidnas and platypuses, bandicoots and possums, goannas and snakes, penguins and pelicans. KI is sometimes described as the ‘Australian Galápagos’, because of the way animals and plants evolved into distinct species and sub-species after rising sea levels left it adrift from the continent at the end of the last Ice Age. With abundant food and in the absence of predators such as dingoes and foxes, the animals proliferated like nowhere else in Australia.

The relatively small, dark-brown Kangaroo Island kangaroo is merely the most obvious of numerous endemics. “Ah, a boomer!” announced Paul, stamping on the brake to avoid the big old retired male that hopped into our path moments after ►



**Cute and brutes**  
Two very different  
approaches to cuddles  
on Kangaroo Island





**‘The grey, 45cm-high tammar wallabies were skittish, hiding in the undergrowth to evade preying wedge-tailed eagle’**







**Look out points**  
Admirals Arch's  
foreboding entrance;  
(left) one of Kangaroo  
Island's most  
celebrated residents

◀ we left Penneshaw ferry port. Soon we were to see hundreds more roos, bounding in mobs or foraging alone in the mallee scrub of Dudley Peninsula. The grey, 45cm-high tammar wallabies were more skittish, hiding in the undergrowth to evade preying wedge-tailed eagles. They emerge into the open only at dusk and are not, sadly, particularly well evolved to traffic awareness, judging by the many roadside corpses. Another island joke: what do you call a wallaby crossing the road? A was-aby.

## Wildlife walking

Captivating though my vehicle-bound introduction to the wildlife was, it was a new string of hiking trails that had, as much as anything, enticed me to KI. The idea is that one day it will be possible to hike from lodge to lodge, though this is not yet on offer. So, with former park ranger Chris Baxter, I drove to Flinders Chase National Park in the far west of the island to scramble along the Rocky River from the high ground down to the sea. Tan-skinned Chris – part-time hiking guide, part-time zoologist and full-time Aussie, whose idea of paradise is to head into the outback with his swag – was a fountain of facts.

We started from a charred patch of eucalyptus forest, where a lightning-sparked

bush fire had swept through last year. Chris began by telling me about Matthew Flinders, “the biggest cheese in KI history”. The Lincolnshire-born explorer, whose name the park remembers, labelled the uninhabited Kangaroo Island when he landed here in 1802 and found it jumping with friendly marsupials yet to learn about guns and sailors’ taste for roo meat. It was Flinders, incidentally, who coined the term ‘Australia’ as shorthand for the southern continent, Terra Australis.

Beyond the scorched earth, our trail criss-crossed the almost-dry river via fords and wooden bridges. We stopped by a shaded pool where, according to Chris, “as often as not I’ll see a platypus or two out to play”. This Australian wildlife mascot, along with the koala, is not indigenous to KI. Rather, both species were introduced in the 1920s when threatened with extinction by predators and fur hunters on the mainland, in what Chris described as “a Noah’s Ark kind of idea”. However, while the randy koalas bred like there was no tomorrow, platypuses survive here only in small numbers and nowhere other than Rocky River. Alas, no duck-billed sightings for us on today.

On the plus side, an echidna wiggled out from under a bottlebrush bush. It is the world’s only egg-laying mammal other than

the platypus but, unlike its cousin, a short-beaked sub-species of echidna is a KI endemic. With long, blond spines and an inquisitive little face that seemed unfazed by our presence, it looked like an overgrown hedgehog. However, when I learned that echidnas mate by means of a four-headed penis and hatch babies (‘puggles’) the size of coffee beans, which suckle by nuzzling nipple-less mammary glands in their mothers’ marsupial-like pouches, I knew I had met something special.

We ended at Snake Lagoon where the river seeps into saltbush marshes fringing Cape du Couedic. Here, cliffs reared up from rocks and islets where New Zealand fur seals were frolicking at the mouth of a cathedral-sized sea cave, which hung with stalactite fangs. The freakish geology seemed to mirror the outlandishness of the wildlife: I gazed across a surf-battered bay to a headland where gigantic, rust-coloured boulders – hollowed and sculpted by the elements – were perched. As I got closer, one rock seemed to morph into a snarling carnivore; another became a giant-beaked bird.

These were the Remarkable Rocks, so labelled by Flinders in his matter-of-fact way in 1802. Other coastal landmarks, such as Cape Bouguer and Vivonne Bay, owe their names to his fellow explorer of the southern ▶





## ‘As I got closer to the Remarkable Rocks, one seemed to morph into a snarling carnivore; another became a giant-beaked bird’

◀ continent, Frenchman Nicolas Baudin; he followed shortly afterwards and was the first to map the island. Driving around KI, I also stumbled on some odder-sounding places, such as Didjabringabeeralong, which at first I took to be an aboriginal name...

### Felons & flesh-eating roos

There were no humans on the island when the first Europeans arrived and it is only in recent decades that archaeological

digs have unearthed grinding stones and spear heads. Indigenous Australians, it is now known, lived here before KI separated from the mainland, and left about 2,000 years ago. Why they deserted an island apparently rich in game, and climatically hospitable, remains a mystery; the nearest thing to a clue is that the name for KI in the language of the mainland Narrinyeri tribe is Narungawai – ‘hunting place of the dead’.

Palaeontologists have also found fossils indicating that the age of megafauna endured much longer on KI than on mainland Australia. As recently as 5,000 years ago, for example, there were 3m-tall flesh-eating kangaroos and wombats the size of rhinos. Perhaps people found that it was simply safer on the mainland.

Since Flinders’ and Baudin’s discoveries, European settlement on KI has been sporadic. First came gangs of sealers, deserters from





**Say what you see**  
The Remarkable  
Rocks have been  
shaped by millennia  
of sand and surf  
hitting them


Emu Bay, we guests joined our hosts each evening to dine on island fare such as King George whiting, rack of tender lamb and bottles of Bay of Shoals sauvignon blanc, grown just beyond the end of the drive.

## Next stop Antarctica

The wildest part of KI is the south coast, where I was lured by the prospect of another day's hike, this time round the Cape Bouguer Wilderness Protection Area and up South West River. I started at the Southern Ocean Lodge, where opulence meets the sea on perhaps the island's most isolated point. Celebrities and moneyed guests (which counted me out) have been coming to this unlikely hotel since it opened in 2008, staying in suites of ceiling-to-floor plate glass. "The future for KI is offering high-spend, low-density ecotourism like in, say, Botswana," a tourism official had told me. Following the African safari lodge model, guests here are treated to wildlife drives at cocktail hour, billed as 'Kangas and Canapés.' ("Booze and roos" my jolly swagman friend Chris had snorted.)

There wasn't a soul around on the Hanson Bay hiking trail when I set off, first fringing a beach strewn with driftwood and shiny white cuttlefish bones, then climbing to a limestone headland with the full force of the Roaring Forties in my face. I found that the ocean has a quite different temper here: stormy and cold with wind-torn waves crashing on the sand in a fizz of salty spume. South, there is nothing but waves, whales and icebergs until Antarctica.

The mood changed again as the trail swung inland to follow the river through crunchy green samphire before plunging into camphor-scented woods where silvery eucalyptus leaves tossed dappled sunlight on to my path. Giant goanna lizards scuttled in the scratchy undergrowth; the occasional koala clung to a tree. Beyond the forest, the path opened into bush and scrubland where I was suddenly among the island's namesake marsupials in overwhelming numbers: roos and their joeys spread out over rippling scrolls of outback as far as the eye could see.

If Flinders was greeted with a scene like this when he made landfall two centuries ago, he didn't beat about the bush when christening Kangaroo Island. 

ships and escapees from the penal colonies of New South Wales, some of whom captured Indigenous Australian women from Tasmania and brought them here as 'wives'. When the British Empire's South Australian Company founded the first formal colony in 1836, they reported having to subdue lawless and brutish settlers. At the end of the Second World War 'soldier settlers', including Chris's late Dad, were offered incentives to populate the island: "Demobbed from serving in the Pacific, my old man was granted land and a livelihood here, so he woke up and discovered he was a farmer."

The gentler north and east are where most people settled. Kingscote (known as 'the big smoke', irony intended) feels like a frontier

town with wooden-fronted shops and a pub strung along a single main street. Beyond, rolling countryside unfurls, freckled with sheep and cattle. There are specialist dairies, vineyards and the buzzing Clifford's Honey Farm, where I watched the world's only pure Ligurian bees, descendants of hives brought from Italy in 1881. Over the past few years something of a food-and-wine revolution has taken off, with KI produce commanding premiums among the foodie sophisticates of Melbourne and Sydney.

I was served fabulous meals at Seascope Lodge, my base, where former farmers Paul and Mandy Brown now let three rooms of their hilltop home. To a backdrop of sweeping views down to the 5km crescent of





# Kangaroo Island Footnotes

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Regional capitals:** Kingscote (KI), Adelaide (South Australia)  
**Island population:** 4,500  
**Language:** English  
**Time:** GMT+9.5 (Oct-Apr GMT+10.5)  
**International dialling code:** +61  
**Visas:** Required by UK nationals. British citizens can apply for a free eVisitor visa from the Department of Immigration ([www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)).  
**Money:** Australian dollar (A\$), currently around A\$1.9 to the UK£. There are ATMs in Kingscote and a few other locations, such as national park visitor centres.

### When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Summer** – Warm and dry; temperatures up to 30°C. School holidays see focus shift from wildlife to beaches.  
 ■ **Autumn** – Dry and parched. Great hiking in cooler temperatures.  
 ■ **Winter** – Cool (down to 10°C); highest rainfall. Best time to see roos and wallabies with joeys out of the pouch. Note, with a mild climate and teeming wildlife year round, KI has no 'off-season'.  
 ■ **Spring** – The island erupts in green.

### Health & safety

It is hard to think of anywhere healthier or safer. However, in the unlikely scenario of an emergency, you'll still have to be sure that your insurance covers an air ambulance to Adelaide.

### Further reading & information

**Central Australia** (Lonely Planet, 2013)  
[tourism.sa.gov.au](http://tourism.sa.gov.au) – The South Australian Tourism Commission  
[southaustralia.com](http://southaustralia.com) – official tourism site

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## THE TRIP

**Austravel** (0800 988 4676, [austravel.com](http://austravel.com)) offers tailor-made itineraries. A nine-night trip including flights on Singapore Airlines, ferry transfers to Kangaroo Island, four nights in Adelaide, three nights at Seascope Emu Bay and two more at the Ozone in Kingscote, costs from £1,849pp.

### Getting there

**Singapore Airlines** (0844 800 2380, [singaporeair.com](http://singaporeair.com)) flies from Heathrow and Manchester to Adelaide via Singapore Changi. Fares from £695 return; journey time from around 22 hours. A free 2.5-hour tour of Singapore is available if you have a stopover of at least 5.5 hours at Changi.

**Sealink** ([sealink.com.au](http://sealink.com.au)) operates ferries between Cape Jarvis and Penneshaw; journey time is 45 minutes. It also runs connecting buses from Adelaide, including pick-ups/drop-offs at hotels.

**Regional Express Airlines** ([rex.com.au](http://rex.com.au)) flies between Adelaide and Kingscote; flight time is 35 minutes.

### Getting around

There is **no public transport** on Kangaroo Island other than buses from Kingscote to the airport and ferry port. There are no taxis. **You need a car** – bring your own on the ferry, or hire one at the airport ([budget.com.au](http://budget.com.au)). Alternatively book **tours** – group or individual – with an agency, such as **Kangaroo Island Wilderness Tours** ([wildernesstours.com.au](http://wildernesstours.com.au)), **Exceptional Kangaroo Island** ([exceptionalkangaroosid.com](http://exceptionalkangaroosid.com)) or **Kangaroo Island Odysseys** ([kangaroosidodysseys.com.au](http://kangaroosidodysseys.com.au)).

### Cost of travel

**Kangaroo Island isn't cheap**, due to the limitations of getting around and the fact that the best wildlife is only accessible with a guide. This is partially mitigated by the current strength of the UK£ against the Australian dollar.

### Accommodation

**Seascope Lodge** (Emu Bay; [seascope.lodge.com.au](http://seascope.lodge.com.au)) offers fabulous views and the company of informative, fun and gracious hosts. Doubles from A\$750 (£385), including breakfast, a three-course dinner and drinks.

**Aurora Ozone Hotel** ([ozonehotelki.com.au](http://ozonehotelki.com.au)) is the best bet in Kingscote. Doubles from A\$180 (£92), including breakfast.

**Southern Ocean Lodge** ([southernoceanlodge.com.au](http://southernoceanlodge.com.au)) is

a luxurious spot that suits celebs and lottery winners. Doubles from A\$2,200 (£1,130), including all dining and an open bar; minimum stay two nights.

### Food & drink

The island is rich in home-grown culinary treats. Try **marron** (freshwater crayfish); **abalone** (a sort of giant sea snail); organic beef and lamb; yoghurts and tangy sheep's cheeses; luscious Ligurian bee honey; merlots and sauvignon blancs.

## KANGAROO ISLAND HIGHLIGHTS



### 1 Dudley Peninsula

Wild open spaces bouncing with kangaroos and wallabies.

### 2 Kingscote

The only town: shops, restaurant and pubs, plus pelicans patrolling the harbour.

### 3 Seal Bay

Wildlife visitor centre and boardwalk through the dunes; sea lions surf ashore to mate on the beach.

### 4 Rocky River

Outback hiking and wildlife, including the only chance to spot platypuses.

### 5 Vivonne Bay

The island's loveliest beach, a long stretch of sand and a jetty where fisherman land southern rock lobsters and King George whiting.

### 6 Cape Borda Lighthouse

Remote and isolated at the end of a long road. Great cliff-top walking.

### 7 Remarkable Rocks

A phenomenon in a breathtaking setting – more than merely 'remarkable'.

### 8 Cape Bouguer

A wild headland facing the raging Southern Ocean. Elemental high drama.





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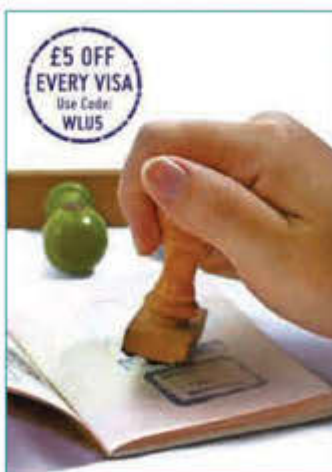


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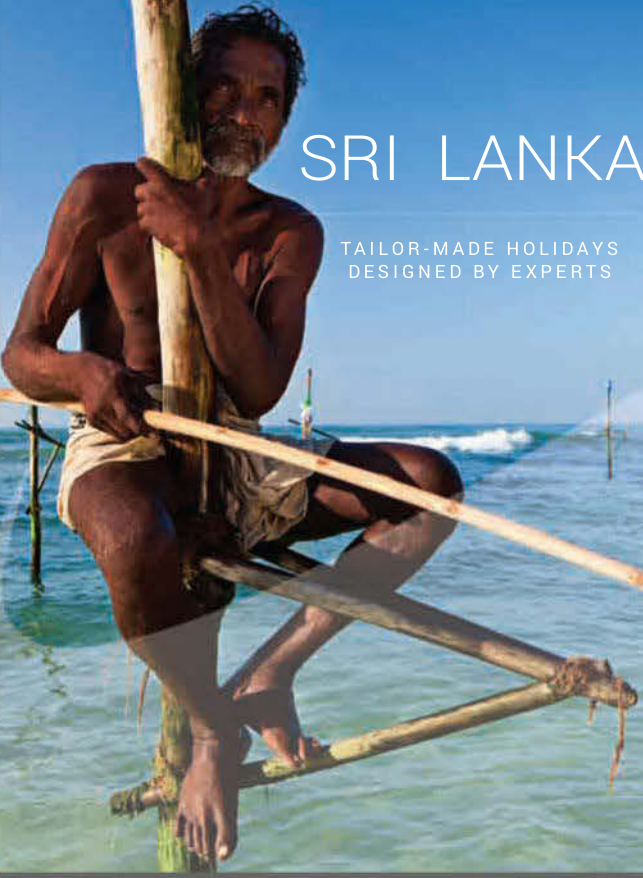
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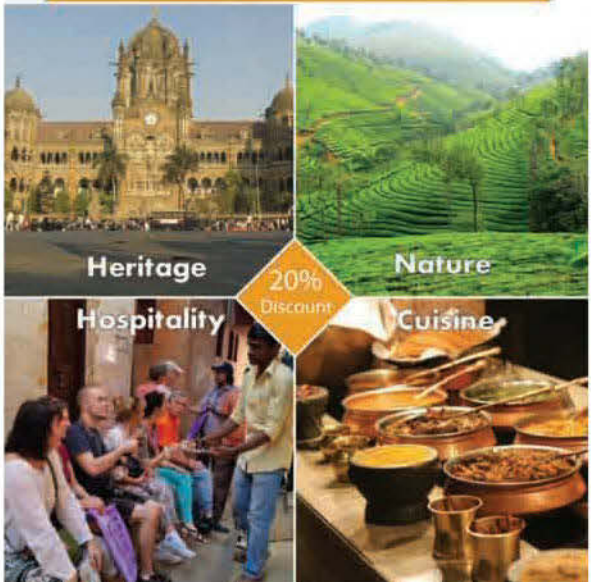





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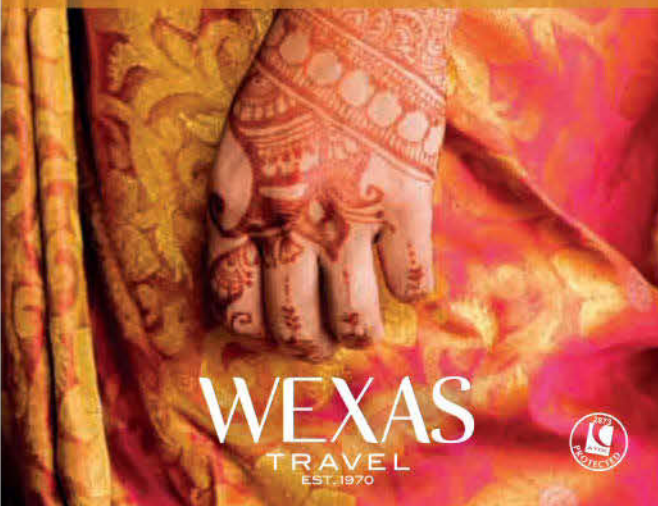
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# How I got into Travel



### Karl Sell

**Product & Operations Director,  
Selective Asia, ([selectiveasia.com](http://selectiveasia.com))**

Karl's love for Asia has shone through

**How long have you worked for Selective Asia?** Nearly six years and very much part of the furniture.

**What did you do before and what attracted you to the job?**

I have worked in the travel industry for 14 years and was already based in Brighton, so when the opportunity arose to join a small, dynamic team that was extremely customer focused, I jumped at it! **What is it like to work for Selective Asia?** We have a fantastic team based both here in the UK and in Asia who all work their socks off to ensure that we create holidays that surpass our clients' expectations.

**What do you like about your role?** The key to job satisfaction, in my opinion, is variation and my role certainly keeps me on my toes!

**What challenges have you faced?** The biggest challenges have been the ones we set ourselves, constantly evolving and driving forward into new destinations, striving to provide unique experiences that make us stand out from the crowd.

**How has your career progressed at Selective Asia?** I started out as an senior sales consultant. I am now involved in key business decisions and am charged with driving our range of product forward in existing and new destinations (watch this space!).

**Tell us about your favourite moments so far.** My first day in the office, flying to Borneo on a two-week inspection trip, is hard to beat!

# Wanderlust Marketing Manager

*Wanderlust* is at an exciting stage in its history. Not only do we publish an award-winning magazine, but traffic to *wanderlust.co.uk* is growing at 50% per annum.

We also run the UK's biggest travel photography competition; we run the only global award for tour guides; we have a successful TripFinder tool; plus we launched (with a partner) an acclaimed industry conference last year, and have other related plans in development.

*Wanderlust* is now looking for an exceptional marketing manager to help us drive the *Wanderlust* brand and related products forward.

The role will encompass all aspects of the marketing activities for the business, including:

- Growing subscription and copy sales for *Wanderlust* magazine
- Building awareness of the *Wanderlust* brand amongst the public, the travel trade and media

- Promoting our digital products including [wanderlust.co.uk](http://wanderlust.co.uk), TripFinder and any other new launches
- Management and promotion of several of our brand extensions, including *Wanderlust Photo of the Year*, *Wanderlust World Guide Awards*, *Wanderlust Journeys*
- Seeking out and managing affiliate and additional revenue generating opportunities, including sponsorships
- Organising *Wanderlust* events, including the *World Guide Awards*, *Travel Photo Awards* and the *Wanderlust Travel Awards*
- Co-organisation and promotion of the Adventure Travel Conference and related events
- Organising and managing our presence at consumer and trade events
- Promoting our products and services to the travel trade

You will need to be organised, creative, and have the ability to work under pressure, within tight budgets, and to deadlines.

You have most likely worked in a magazine publishing background, but we will consider people from a relevant travel background too.

You'll have an inherent understanding of the *Wanderlust* audience, and understand their wants and needs.

We're a small, independent company, so you'll need to relish being hands-on and proactive, as well as being able to think strategically. This isn't a job for clock-watchers or part-timers, but is a terrific opportunity for someone who wants to really make a difference.

The role will be based in our Windsor office. Salary will be commensurate with experience and level of seniority.

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## Travel Company Tales



### JTB

#### Clive Buckingham

The Manager of Leisure Travel of the Japanese specialist on working the London Olympics and coping with growing demand

### How did JTB start?

JTB started back in 1912, as the Japan Tourist Bureau, established with the aim of welcoming tourists to Japan. The European style design of our tiny first office meant that work was occasionally interrupted by locals thinking that the building was a German beer hall.

We were first accredited as an IATA travel agency in November 1948, and became 'Japan Travel Bureau Inc' in 1963.

### Early challenges?

One of the company's biggest challenges came in 1970: to welcome 12 million people to

Japan during the World Exposition in Osaka. In 2012 we celebrated our 100th anniversary – but of course it was also the year of the London Olympics. We handled both athletes and supporters, looking after a total of 7,178 people over the course of the games. As part of the JTB task force involved, I remember staying many nights until the end of our 2am shift at our main hotel in London, talking to the day's clients and our team of guides who were still on a high after seeing the games during the day.

### What makes JTB unique?

As JTB is the largest travel company in Japan, the

organisation occupies a unique position in the country's travel industry.

The JTB Group includes companies involved in publishing, coach transport, travel luggage and insurance as well as tour operating. With over 26,000 employees in the JTB Group worldwide, the challenge is to stay agile and responsive to the markets in which we operate, and to become more international.



### Future plans?

Travel to Japan is in very good shape, thanks partly to a favourable exchange rate which makes Japan cheaper than it has been for many years.

We aim to ride this wave of popularity of the country and keep devising new tour products so that we can remain in the forefront of travel from all countries to Japan for many years to come.

In our JTB branch in London, we specialise particularly in tailor-made travel, and have a growing team of Japan specialists to advise travellers and make a wide variety of arrangements, from skiing in Hokkaido to a stay in a traditional temple.

[www.japanspecialist.co.uk](http://www.japanspecialist.co.uk)



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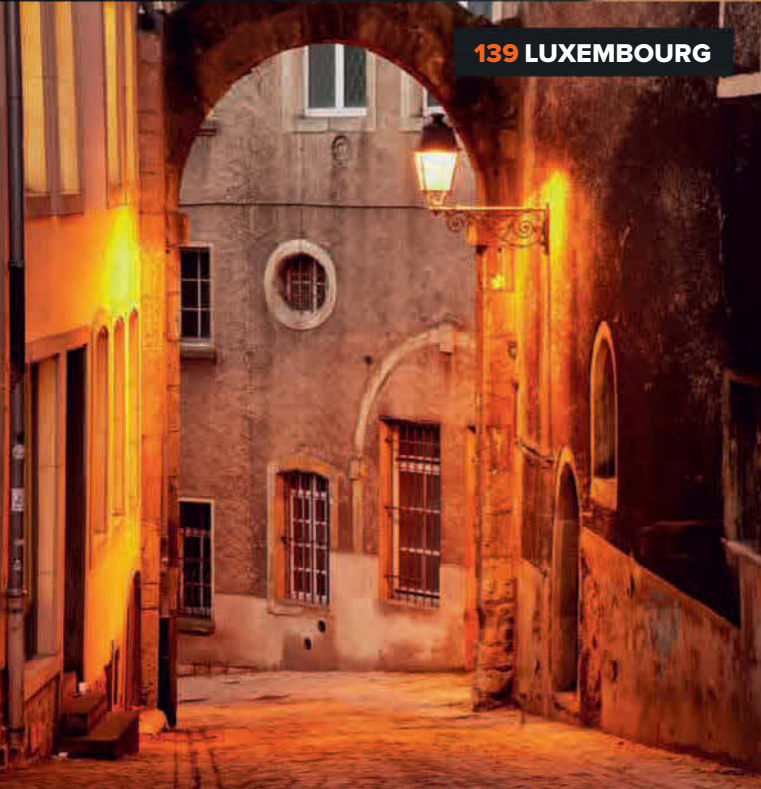
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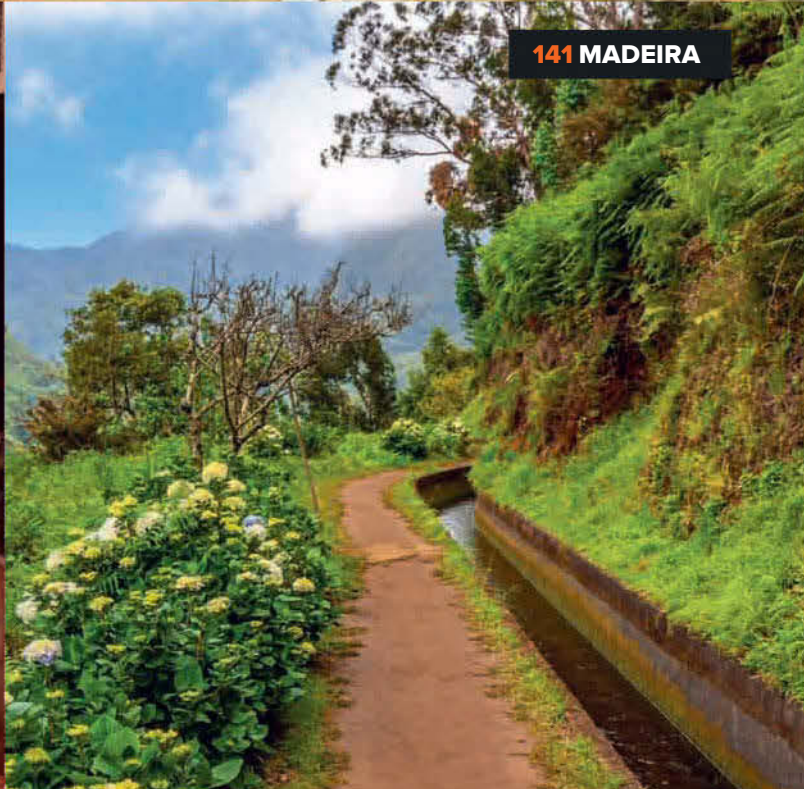
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# Jurassic Coast, England

Head to the East Devon and Dorset coast and you can discover 185 million years of the earth's history. Welcome to Britain's *Jurassic Park*, says **Phoebe Smith**

Just imagine going to the beach, wandering over the sand dunes and spying what appears to be a rock jutting out from the sand. Imagine taking a closer look, digging away more sand and discovering that the rock is much bigger, and imbedded more deeply, than you thought. Imagine pulling away yet more sand to find, to your delight, that it's not a rock at all but a bone. And not just any bone – a dinosaur bone. So it was for one Mary Anning who, in Lyme Regis, Dorset, in the early part of the 19th century, not only found an abundance of dinosaur and fish fossils, but also made the first discovery of an ichthyosaur skeleton and the first two skulls correctly identified as plesiosaur.

It's no wonder then that the stretch of England's coast between Oorombe Point near Exmouth and Old Harry Rocks near Swanage became known as the Jurassic Coast. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage site and voted one of the Greatest

Natural Wonders in Britain in 2005, this crumbling, fossil-rich coastline was created over 100 million years ago when massive earth movements pushed up and tilted ancient layers of rock, opening it up to erosion and thus exposing a glorious neopolitan-like trio of rock from the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods.

All this can be seen today by wandering along the well-marked South West Coast Path National Trail – quite literally, a stroll through time. Stretching from East Devon to East Dorset for 153km, the Jurassic Coast offers more exploring possibilities than can be covered in one long weekend, but if time is tight one of the best places to base yourself is Lulworth Cove.

The cove here looks so perfectly round it could have been gouged by an ice cream scoop; actually it has been shaped by the waves, which erode the cove's combination of clay and limestone at different rates. Its neighbouring landform, known

as Lulworth Crumple (officially Stair Hole), is a great example of the area's folded rock strata, as is the eroded archway of nearby Durdle Door. Lulworth is also home to the Fossil Forest, the remains of a 145-million-year-old Jurassic swamp forest where dinosaurs once walked.

Strolling along most sections of this coastline (and walking is by far the best way to explore it), you get glimpses into its geological and prehistoric past – but there are also opportunities to learn a little about its human heritage too. There are tales of swashbuckling pirates around Osmington Mills. There are the residents of the ghost village of Tyneham, who were forced to give up their homes to the Army during the Second World War. And there is that aforementioned Victorian fossil hunter Mary Anning – who also happens to be the lady who inspired the classic tongue twister, 'She sells seashells on the seashore'. Here, history whispers in your ear with every step. ►



## ◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

### ■ Essential Info

**When to go:** Year-round. Spring and autumn (outside of any school holidays) are the best times, offering decent weather and fewer people. Check [www.tynehamopc.org.uk](http://www.tynehamopc.org.uk) for opening times of Tyneham ghost village; call 01929 404819 for firing times at MOD Lulworth Range.

**Getting there:** Bournemouth airport is 43km away from both Lulworth Cove and Studland (the official start of the Jurassic Coast). The nearest train station to Lulworth is Wool (8km; on the Bournemouth-Weymouth line). You can arrange a taxi pick-up from here.

**Getting around:** Aside from walking the South West Coast Path, the best way to explore is by car – buses are infrequent.

**Where to stay:** Lulworth Cove is an ideal base for exploring the coast. Lulworth Lodge is a newly refurbished walker's hotel (pictured), minutes from the sea, run by **HF Holidays**

(020 8732 1250, [hfolidays.co.uk](http://hfolidays.co.uk)). A self-guided three-night walking break costs from £249pp and includes maps, suggested walking routes, hearty breakfasts, an ample picnic lunch and a tasty dinner.

**More info:** For more Jurassic Coast information see [jurassiccoast.org](http://jurassiccoast.org); [southwestcoastpath.com](http://southwestcoastpath.com).

**Further reading:** For more on the area see the new *Slow Dorset Guide* (Bradt, 2015). For a good walking companion check out *Walking the Jurassic Coast* (Cicerone, 2015).



### TOP TIP

If you have more time and want to hunt for fossils, head to Monmouth Beach, west of Lyme Regis, where you can walk along an 'ammonite pavement'.



### Day 1: GO WEST

Start with a wander up to **Stair Hole** where you can peer at its multi-layer folds formed by movement in the earth's crust. Spot the small arch beginning to form, forced by the movement of the waves – you're witnessing the formation of the next Lulworth Cove.

From here head west on the SWCP. Leave early and you should beat the crowds who park here to make their way to one of the most photographed rock formations on the coast,

**Durdle Door.** Admire its faults and folds from the clifftop

(pictured), then head down to its shingle beach to listen to the sound of the pebbles being washed up and then stolen again by the waves.

Continue along the undulating trail as it hugs the steep rises of the coast. It's knee-busting work but persevere to **Osmington Mills** where you can reward your efforts with a pint of the locally brewed cask ales at the **Smugglers Inn**. The hostelry dates back to the 13th century and was home to the leader of a gang of smugglers in the 18th and 19th centuries. Enjoy views over to the Isle of Portland before retracing the 8.5km back (or calling a taxi).



### Day 2: GO EAST

Take the SWCP heading east. You soon emerge above **Lulworth Cove**. Follow the path as it circumnavigates the cirque to peer back over to the cottages and bobbing sailboats.

Continue on the path – as long as the military aren't firing (see 'When to Go'). You'll arrive above the **Fossil Forest**. Descend the steps to the cliff ledges to spot pimple-like rock mounds – these are burrs, created by algae that grew around the swamp trees. Fossilised trunks would have stood inside these rings, but were removed by Victorian collectors.

Head on to the ghost village of **Tyneham** (above; no refreshments).

In 1943 the residents were served with an eviction notice, in order to allow special forces to train here. The last resident to leave pinned a note to the church door begging the MOD to look after their homes; they all believed they'd be allowed back post-war but the government did a U-turn on the promise. Now you can wander the well-preserved church and among what remains of the cottages (now merely shells).

Head back to Lulworth but take the path over the ridge rather than the coast so you can peer down into the military range where rusting tanks sit amid the grassland.

### Day 3: GO FURTHER

What better way to end a three-day exploration of this coast than with a journey to its start. Get in the car and drive east, bound for **Old Harry Rocks**, the easternmost point of the Jurassic Coast. Here, waves froth around three white stacks that were once part of a long bed of chalk running from the **Isle of Purbeck** to the Isle of White. Old Harry Rocks used to be the bases of arches but are now spires. It's a pleasant 1.5km stroll to take them in on land, or you could get closer by sea kayak.

En route it's worth visiting **Durlston Country Park** near Swanage (above). There are several trails but the best

takes you down to **Durlston Castle** (a restaurant), past the stone map of the world and along the clifftops; here you might spy some of the 250-plus bird species that have been recorded or climbers about to tackle the cliff faces below. Wander along to see the old lighthouse at **Anvil Point**.

Take the inland road to pay a visit to **Corfe Castle** ([nationaltrust.org.uk](http://nationaltrust.org.uk)). Built in the 11th century, it's now an atmospheric ruin that offers views over the Purbeck Hills and beyond. End at the on-site cafe for a slap-up celebratory Dorset cream tea – and a promise to come back and explore more of the Jurassic Coast. **📌**



Small, surprising Luxembourg has more than enough to entertain you for a long weekend



# Luxembourg City

As Luxembourg celebrates 200 years of its Grand Duchy status in 2015, **Hazel Plush** finds there's more to its capital than first meets the eye...

## **i** Before you arrive

Luxembourg City is full of surprises. As you trundle into its centre on the airport transfer bus, the dizzying views of the Alzette River gorge – flanked by spiky-spired houses and battle-worn 17th-century ramparts – make a striking first impression. Who knew this nation, often accused of being boring, had such propensity for drama?

Luxembourg City first served as a fortress – although it was unable to defend itself against foreign powers for hundreds of years. It was controlled by various Spanish, French, Austrian and Prussian armies from the 15th century, with that imposing river gorge serving as a natural barricade. It was declared a Grand Duchy – a territory ruled by a Grand Duke or Duchess – in 1815 while under Dutch rule, but it wasn't fully liberated until King William III died in 1890. It's little wonder that this tiny country (a mere 2,586 sq km) has remodelled itself as neutral, uneventful territory, home to various EU institutions.

But Luxembourg has another side. It revels in its multicultural roots: everything from its architecture to the local dress sense is a happy mish-mash of French, German and Dutch influence. The menu might be in German, but your waitress might take your order in French. Dinner could be a hearty Flemish stew or a crispy *flammkuchen* with lardons and onions, just like in Germany.

And now those tumultuous territorial clashes are over, modern-day Luxembourg City actually celebrates its battle wounds – the most spectacular of which is the Alzette gorge's honeycomb of old military tunnels, hewn over centuries by pick axe and gunpower. They once sheltered hundreds of soldiers, who would poke their cannons through shadowy openings to fire on marauding forces in the valley below. Today, you can poke your head through those same nooks to gaze over one of Europe's most picturesque, peaceful – and underrated – capitals.

## **✈** At the airport

It's a 70-minute flight from London to Luxembourg. The city's Findel Airport is small, modern and easy to navigate. Arrivals has a taxi rank and bus station, as well as cafés and shops.

## **🚌** Getting into town

Take the number 9 or 16 bus into the city centre; a single costs €2. A taxi from the airport to the city centre costs around €30 (£22); it's a 20-minute journey.

A train line, connecting the airport to the city centre and Kirchberg, is due to open in a few years.

## **🚆** Other ways to arrive

Luxembourg has great rail connections with other European cities – especially Brussels (hourly; 3hrs), Paris (less frequent; 2hrs) and Basel (3.5hrs). The road network is extensive, and traffic congestion is joyfully scarce. ►



## ◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

### ■ Essential Info

**Population:** 520,672

**Languages:** Luxembourgish, French, German, English

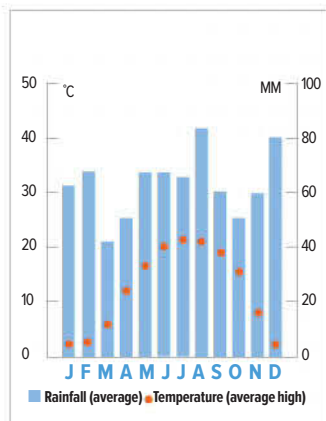
**Timezone:** GMT+1 (Mar-Oct GMT+2)

**International dialling code:** +352

**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals

**Currency:** Euro (€), currently €1.35 to the UK£

**Best viewpoint:** The lookout points of the Bock Casemates (see First Day's Tour) have great views of the river and ramparts.



**Health issues:** None

**Recommended guidebook:** *Belgium & Luxembourg* (Rough Guides, 2011)

**Web resource:** [visitluxembourg.com](http://visitluxembourg.com); [www.lcto.lu](http://www.lcto.lu)

**Climate:** Temperate, without extremes – similar to the UK.



### TOP TIP

Get free entry at over 60 galleries, museums and sights throughout the Grand Duchy with a Luxembourg Card – from €13 (one person, one day). See [visitluxembourg.com](http://visitluxembourg.com)

### ■ First Day's Tour

Start with German meats, French cheeses and Belgian chocolate at the **farmer's market in Place Guillaume II** (Sat & Wed, 7am-2pm). Tuck into your picnic outside the **Palais Grand-Ducal**, the Grand Duke's pied-a-terre; if he's at home, the Luxembourg flag will be raised. Tours available from 13 July-6 September ([lcto.lu](http://lcto.lu)).

Wander through the Ville Haute to the lively, café-lined **Place d'Armes**; there's a flea market here every second and fourth Saturday of the month. The nearby **Luxembourg City Museum of History** (€5) is stuffed with artefacts that trace the Duchy's tumultuous history.

Follow the boundary of the old Luxembourg fortress along the **Chemin de la Corniche**, the stone ramparts built by the French and Spanish in the 17th century, to peer down at the jigsaw of pastel houses and the Alzette River.

The cluster of skyscrapers across the valley is the corporate quarter of

**Kirchberg**, home of numerous banks and EU offices as well as **MUDAM**, a contemporary art gallery designed by IM Pei (€7).



For more valley views, look out from the UNESCO-listed **Bock Casemates**, 23km of subterranean passages from which soldiers defended the fortress in the 17th century. These days you can tour a small section of the tunnels (€4).

Reach the valley floor via the marked route of stairs and narrow walkways, or take the **free elevator** from the Ministry of Justice. At the bottom, tuck into flammkuchen and local Bofferding beer.



### ■ Where to Stay

**Top end:** With its lavish interior design, impeccable restaurants and smooth service, **Parc Beaux-Arts Hotel** (1 Rue de Sigefroi; [parcbeauxarts.lu](http://parcbeauxarts.lu)) is an Old Town gem. Rooms are spacious and welcoming, and each suite features paintings and sculptures by local artists. Doubles with breakfast from €184 (£135).

**Mid-range:** The arty **Hotel Simoncini** (6 Rue de Notre Dame; [hotelsimoncini.lu](http://hotelsimoncini.lu); pictured) is a sleek, modern bolthole with cosy rooms, generous breakfasts and

very friendly staff. It's a two-minute walk from Place Guillaume. View locally created modern art at **Galerie Simoncini** ([galeriesimoncini.lu](http://galeriesimoncini.lu)), which occupies a floor of the hotel. Doubles with breakfast from €155 (£114).

**Budget:** **Parc Belle-Vue** ([parcbellevue.lu](http://parcbellevue.lu)) offers great value for money. It's clean, contemporary and even has two skittle alleys so you can unwind like a true Luxembourger. Doubles with breakfast from €93.50 (£69).



### ■ Stay or Go

Go. Luxembourg is surprisingly diverse, with enough to fill a busy long weekend.

Echternach is an easy 40-minute drive from the city. This sleepy town overlooks the German border, with a grand basilica at its centre. Base yourself at **Hotel Bel-Air** ([hotel-belair.lu](http://hotel-belair.lu)), a characterful hotel just outside the town with rolling countryside views. From here, explore Beaufort Castle (€5; guided tours €10, 11am & 4pm), and hike segments of the Mullerthal Trail, a 112km route passing dense forest, rocky

escarpments and burbling streams. The trail is well-marked; pick up free brochures from any tourist office.

Remich, a 50min drive from Echternach, is the wine-making centre of Luxembourg. Take a tour through the damp fermenting cellars of **Caves St Martin** ([cavesstmartin.lu](http://cavesstmartin.lu)), then swig your way through its *crémants* (from €5.20, tour and taste; open April-Oct; closed all-day Mon/Tues am). If sparkling isn't to your taste, try another of the many wineries – each has its own speciality. 🍷



**Water walking**  
The Levada do Caldeirão Verde links tunnels and waterfalls



# The *levadas*, Madeira

Hit the centuries-old wilderness-taming waterways of the Portuguese island to discover its most atmospheric and historic walking trails

## **i** Get orientated

When the first Portuguese settlers arrived in Madeira in the early part of the 15th century, it was very much a wild frontier – uninhabited and unsuited to agriculture. Yet by the 16th century it had become a major centre of sugar production and a boon to the Portuguese economy. Such a turnaround would have been impossible without the vast system of *levadas*, waterways designed to carry excess rainwater from the north of the island to the arid lands in the south.

Criss-crossing Madeira like a network of veins, plunging through forests, skirting cliff faces and connecting tumbling cataracts, these hand-carved channels make up the largest water transportation system in the world. They're also one of the best ways to see the island – in recent decades the paths that run alongside them have become a magnet for walkers and wildlife lovers.

## **✈** Getting there & around

Direct flights to Madeira run from a number of UK airports, including London, Birmingham and Glasgow. Fares form around £59 return; flight time from 3 hours, 45 minutes.

The island is well serviced by buses and taxis. Car hire starts from £15 a day.

## **🚶** The visit

Levada walks, ranging from leisurely woodland strolls to vertigo-inducing cliff traverses, are scattered across Madeira. You can walk them independently or with a guide.

Among the most famous is the Levada do Caldeirão Verde (6.5km each way/5.5hrs) on the island's north coast, which links many waterfalls and four tunnels. In central Madeira, the Levada das 25 Fontes (4.6km/3hrs) passes a lagoon and a spectacular set of 25 springs, while the Levada do Moinho (10.3km/3.5 hrs),

on the north-western end of the island, runs via the ruins of several watermills.

Whichever route you choose, a good pair of boots is essential. Also, the weather can change quickly and without warning so pack appropriate clothing. A torch is advisable so you can safely negotiate the tunnels. Madeira's climate is mild all year round, but visitor numbers are lower from April to June and September to November.

The island is renowned for its flora, and the levadas are particularly beautiful in August and September when many are lined with flowering hydrangeas and agapanthus. Keep your eyes peeled for endemic bird species, including Zino's petrel, one of the most endangered seabirds in Europe, and the trocáz pigeon, which lives in the island's UNESCO-listed laurel forest.

For a full list of levada walks, as well as details of Madeira's walking festivals and events see [www.visitmadeira.pt](http://www.visitmadeira.pt) ►



## ◀ Madeira's levadas

There is enough water on Madeira, but only in the north. So the first Portuguese settlers had to come up with a way to irrigate their terraced fields in the south of the island. They transported it in stone channels, the levadas.



### ◆ Unequal distribution

In the north of Madeira trade winds supply lots of rain. Thanks to nonporous laterite and basalt layers, the water is stored underground and comes to the surface in springs. As the rain clouds don't move beyond the central mountain chain, the south is much drier.



### Levadas

The stone channels measure just 1m wide and 500cm deep. Some 200 levadas were counted at the beginning of the 19th century. In 1966 the last levada, Levada dos Tornos, was built.



It is 106km long and runs through 16km of tunnels, the longest of which is 5.1km long. The water that is transported through Levada dos Tornos irrigates 9,900 hectares of land.



Many of the narrow and shallow levadas are interconnected. They must be maintained constantly, for which small paths have been made alongside them. These are now popular hiking trails.



### Hydropower plants

The Socorridos hydropower plant works along similar lines to the levadas. It is fed via a 15.5km-long tunnel and canal system, and supplies the Funchal/Câmara de Lobos region with electricity and water.

### ■ Essentials

**Language:** Portuguese

**Time:** GMT+1 (Mar-Oct GMT+2)

**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals

**Money:** Euro (€), currently €1.4 to the UK£

**Health:** Take a valid EHIC card. Wear sunscreen and a hat.



This feature is adapted from Marco Polo's *Travel Handbook: Madeira*, which contains infographics, insider tips, tour suggestions and a large pull-out map. See [marco-polo.com](http://marco-polo.com)



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# Fresh perspectives on travel?

It's always good to get a new perspective on a place. But, increasingly, that alternative angle is coming courtesy of drones.

Formerly more associated with shady government surveillance or warfare, these tiny flying robots – which can be easily armed with cameras – are growing in popularity (you can buy one on Amazon for less than £100).

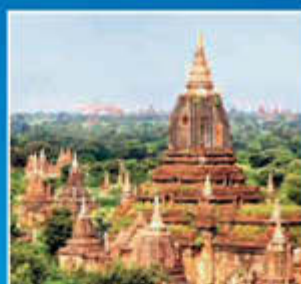
More travel photographers are using them to capture sights you simply can't get from the ground – from looking down on Tahiti's Taha'a Lagoon (*bottom left*) to overseeing daredevil stunts in Rio (*bottom right*) to literal bird's eye views in Denpasar, Indonesia (*top*). To see more incredible shots, go to [www.model-space.com/gb/amazing-images-captured-by-a-drone](http://www.model-space.com/gb/amazing-images-captured-by-a-drone).



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